

# ISSE condemns police assault on University of Florida student

International Students for Social Equality (US)  
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The International Students for Social Equality condemns Monday's brutal attack on a student at the University of Florida as an outrageous violation of democratic rights and free speech. The journalism student was tackled, handcuffed, assaulted with a Taser stun gun and arrested by university police during a forum held by Democratic senator and 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry.

The assault on the student, Andrew Meyer, a 21-year-old senior in the College of Journalism and Communications, occurred after Meyer pointedly questioned Kerry on the refusal of himself and the Democratic Party to pursue charges of voter fraud in the 2004 elections, seek to impeach President Bush, or oppose preparations for war against Iran.

Kerry said nothing while six police officers grabbed the student in the midst of his questioning of the senator and proceeded to shock him at least once with a Taser gun. On Tuesday, Kerry refused to condemn the actions of the police. "The police must have had a reason to make their decision," Kerry said, adding that the attack on the student was "a law enforcement issue."

The incident began when Meyer approached an open floor microphone during a question-and-answer session. Citing a book by journalist Greg Palast, who documented voting irregularities in the 2004 elections, Meyer said, "[Palast] said you won the 2004 election—isn't that amazing? There were multiple reports of disenfranchising of black voters on the day of the election in 2004 in Florida and Ohio."

Kerry quickly interrupted, "So what's the question, what's the question?" One of a group of campus police and officials standing directly behind Meyer approached him and told him to leave the microphone.

Speaking to the campus police, Meyer said, "He's

been talking for two hours—I think I can have two minutes, thank you very much." He then asked the senator, with so many outstanding instances of fraud already being reported during voting, "How could you concede *on the day*?"

Meyer next asked Kerry, "If you're so against [invading] Iran, how come you're not saying, 'Let's impeach Bush now'? Impeach Bush now before he can invade Iran!" Meyer pointed out that a Republican-controlled Congress had impeached Clinton on completely frivolous grounds.

He then asked, "Were you a member of Skull and Bones in college with Bush?"

At that point, the microphone was cut off and police grabbed Meyer by the arms and began to pull him out of the auditorium.

Meyer protested, shouting, "I haven't done anything! They're arresting me! I haven't done anything!"

After being dragged to the back of the auditorium, Meyer briefly pulled his arms free before being grabbed around the neck and tackled by the police officers. They proceeded to shock him with a Taser gun, pull him out of the auditorium, and arrest him.

The police attack, captured in numerous video recordings, prompted gasps, shouts and protestations from the audience. In contrast, Kerry was utterly indifferent. As Meyer lay on the floor crying out for help, Kerry quipped, "After they take him out of here I'll answer his question. Unfortunately, he's not available to come up here and swear me in as president."

Outside the auditorium, the campus police told Meyer he was under arrest for "inciting a riot." He was taken to Alachua County jail and booked on charges of resisting arrest with violence, a felony, disturbing the peace and interfering with school administrative

functions, a misdemeanor. The charges carry up to five years in prison.

This Gestapo-like assault on a student who was simply exercising his right of free speech and in no way threatening the senator or disrupting the meeting is symptomatic of an effort to create a climate of fear, intimidation and repression on college campuses around the country.

In recent months, a number of professors have been fired or forced to resign after campaigns by right-wing organizations. Norman Finkelstein, a highly respected scholar and critic of Zionism, was denied tenure at DePaul University because of his views. University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill was fired in July on the specious grounds that his dissident interpretations of US history constituted historical falsification. The University of California at Irvine last week rescinded a deanship offer to prominent law professor and critic of the Bush administration Erwin Chemerinsky, before reinstating the offer after a public uproar.

These are only the most prominent episodes of a more general campaign. Organizations such as CampusWatch are witch-hunting academics who hold left-wing views and are critical of the militarist and anti-democratic policies of the government. They are doing so under conditions where growing sections of students and youth are moving into opposition to the entire political establishment.

The questions raised by Meyer reflect the sentiments of broad sections of the population. His arrest provoked a protest of several hundred students at the University of Florida on Tuesday.

Every student should ask himself or herself: If this is how the authorities react to one student asking questions at a public forum, what will be the reaction to the development of mass protests? The treatment of Meyer is a warning to students all across the country.

Behind the attack on democratic rights lies the growing social polarization in America—a country where students are forced to take on huge debts, record numbers of working families are thrown out of their homes, and millions are driven into poverty as a result of corporate downsizing, while hedge fund managers rake in billions of dollars a year. The indifference of Kerry to the treatment of Meyer reflects the real attitude of the politicians of both parties—many of them millionaires like Kerry—to the people.

As opposition to the war in Iraq and future wars escalates, combined with social anger over growing inequality and economic insecurity, the response of the political establishment will be repression. The apparatus has already been set up, with the support of both parties, in the vast expansion of domestic spying and the buildup of the police powers of the government.

The ISSE demands that all charges be dropped against Andrew Meyer. We further call for a criminal investigation into the conduct of the University of Florida police. This is not the first incident involving the use of a Taser gun against an unarmed student. In November 2006, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) police used a Taser gun against an unarmed student as he was leaving the library.

The ISSE, the student organization of the Socialist Equality Party, has launched a campaign to build chapters all across the country. We are fighting for the development of an international movement against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the growing threat of war against Iran that is based on a break with the Democratic Party and all of the parties of the corporate ruling elite.

We say that these wars cannot be ended by appeals to Congress or the Democratic Party. They can be ended only through the independent mobilization of working people, students and youth in a struggle against the capitalist system that is the root cause of war. We call on students at the University of Florida and around the world to build the International Students for Social Equality and join the fight for international socialism.

*Videos of the incident are in wide circulation on the Internet. (Student Brutally Tasered by Police at John Kerry Q&A; UF Student Tasered at John Kerry Q & A)*

*To find out more about the ISSE or help build a club at your school, click here.*



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