

New York University students protesting Gaza killings arrested at Israeli Independence rave

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Two New York University (NYU) students were arrested last Friday while protesting an event in Washington Square Park celebrating the founding of the State of Israel. The pro-Israel event “Rave in the Park,” organized by the NYU student group Realize Israel, brought a crowd of over 100 students and youth dressed in Israeli nationalist garb to the park for a dance party commemorating a regime currently carrying out a massacre of Palestinians on the Gaza border.

The two detained students were part of a counter-event, “Rally for Palestinian Right of Return,” organized by NYU Students for Justice in Palestine as well as other student organizations at NYU, Columbia University and City University of New York (CUNY) Hunter. According to the student publication NYU Local, one student who allegedly set an Israeli flag on fire was charged with reckless endangerment and resisting arrest, while the other student who allegedly stole and vandalized an Israeli flag was charged with assault, disorderly conduct, robbery and criminal mischief. Both students were detained overnight and released the following day.

Realize Israel posted a response to these events on their Facebook page, reading: “We acknowledge that these protesters have strong opinions and we respect and encourage free speech and peaceful protest. However, we condemn in the strongest terms the violent actions perpetrated by the two individuals, which have no place at our university.”

This statement aligns closely with the state of Israel’s response to the “March of Return,” the ongoing six-week demonstration along the border of Gaza to protest the 11-year-long illegal and inhumane blockade by Israel and Egypt. The Palestinian demonstration will

continue until May 15, the day after Israel’s Independence Day, also recognized as Nakba (Catastrophe) Day, commemorating the quarter million Palestinians displaced in order to establish Israel in 1948.

At NYU, Zionist student leaders accept and validate the police arrest of those students who raise questions about the Israeli state’s ongoing disregard for the democratic rights of the Palestinian people. In Israel, by announcing that the “March of Return” in Gaza is not peaceful protest—but rather terrorism, which necessitates deadly military force to “guard the country’s borders” and “protect its sovereignty”—the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accepts and validates the massacre of blockaded Palestinians, with the current death toll up to 44 and over 6,000 reported injured by Gaza’s Ministry of Health.

Realize Israel went on to explain that the student group “is not political at its core,” while their self-described mission on their Facebook page is “to strengthen and promote support of Israel throughout the greater NYU community.” One cannot—blindly or intentionally—support a country without supporting the country’s politics.

Student Khalid Abudawas, who is acting president of NYU Students for Justice in Palestine, was interviewed by NYU Local. “The event was to show them that we are not going to stand by idly while people blindly support the state of Israel,” he said, “nor are we going to allow them to freely practice and celebrate Zionism, while people are dying, especially at this time.

“We have family who are being affected by Israeli imperialism and Israeli colonialism and we have family

members who have died because of it.”

It is also of note that NYU Students for Justice in Palestine faced censorship on Facebook after creating their public counter-rally event. The organization posted: “We are highly disturbed that this event is being censored by Facebook. When you search for our event, all that comes up is the ‘Rave in the Park,’ which we are protesting.” This claim was confirmed by other Facebook users commenting on the post who encountered the same problem.

Facebook recently spelled out their new policy on “security” and “fake news” (meaning oppositional viewpoints): “We don’t remove false news from Facebook but instead, significantly reduce its distribution by showing it lower in the News Feed.” This censorship, implemented in secret and without user feedback, apparently extends to hiding events in search results as well.

In a statement released on Monday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at NYU said:

“The rally had been organized by NYU Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) in opposition to a ‘Rave in the Park’ by the Zionist student group Realize Israel on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of Israel. While Realize Israel insists that it is an organization celebrating ‘Israeli culture,’ the rave, taking place as it did amidst the massacre of dozens of peaceful Gaza protesters by the Israeli state, was politically highly provocative. Against this background, the arrests by the NYPD were an act of state repression, aimed at propping up the pro-Zionist event, and at intimidating all those opposed to the crimes committed by the Israeli state with the full support of US imperialism.

“While the IYSSE at NYU denounces the arrests as an act of state repression and an assault on free speech, we must also state and clarify our political differences with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, which SJP supports. The perspective of the BDS is politically bankrupt and ultimately serves to reinforce the ethnic and religious divisions in the Middle East.

“Dismissing the Israeli working class as inherently reactionary, and rejecting any progressive role for either the Palestinian or Israeli working class, the BDS campaign instead orients to lobbying American

imperialism into overseeing a settlement between the Israeli government and the Palestinian bourgeoisie. Such a compromise can only come at the expense of both Israeli and Palestinian workers and will fail to resolve any of the outstanding crimes and injustices. Against this perspective we counterpose that of the revolutionary, historic role of the working class and we insist on fighting for its independence and unity across religious and nationalist lines in the fight for a socialist Middle East.”



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