

Gaza genocide protesters locked out of sit-in by Wayne State University campus police

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2 December 2023

On Thursday, police blocked students from Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit from entering a publicly accessible building, where they had planned to quietly protest Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The group of several dozen students included members of the campus student organizations Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Jewish Voice for Peace, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and members of the Student Senate.

The students planned to assemble to demand that the university administration take action on a resolution passed by the Student Senate that called on the university to cease its investments in defense contractors and businesses complicit in the genocide in Gaza.

The decision by the WSU administration to use campus police to block the students from carrying out a planned protest is an attack on their democratic right to political expression. Despite this attack, the students proceeded to hold their demonstration.

When the student protesters and their supporters assembled outside the university Faculty/Administration Building (FAB) at the scheduled time, they were barred from entering the building by campus police. Signs were posted on the doors saying the entrance was closed.

When organizers attempted to enter the building through an alternate entrance, they were again met by campus police, who told them they were not permitted to protest inside the facility. The FAB is the main administrative building on the WSU campus and includes the offices of the president of the university, Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy.

After they were blocked from entering the building, the protesters proceeded to hold their rally and sit-in in front of the barred doors of the building.

Mohammed, the co-vice president of the WSU SJP, opened the event by explaining what had just happened. He said, "Clearly, they do not want us in. They claim we are violating policies, even though we are not. This is our right to protest peacefully and quietly inside, which is what we were trying to do."

Several speakers were then asked to give their prepared remarks to the group.

The first speaker was a WSU student senator, Ridaa Khan. She said:

After many events, protests, passing the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] resolution in the Student Senate and emails to the administration, our administration is hoping that we are done, and that we're tired. For them our work is an annoyance in their day and nothing more. It's just one more email for them to curate, and that's it. They are not listening to us.

The WSU student described the death and destruction meted out on the Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli military, which has wiped out entire families. She said:

As Americans we know how much of our money and institutional power is the arm behind this genocide. And all we ask is for our university to divest from the companies whose stock value is rising and whose weapons are wiping out families. Our university invests in that, and they responded to this request by telling us that our words could be "harmful," that divesting from war profiteering companies that sell to Israel and other aggressors could hurt someone's feelings.

More than 15,000 people have been murdered at our country's hands, and our administration does not want to risk its connections for the absolute bare minimum of calling for a ceasefire. We demand that they do so. President Espy, you must endorse the message of a ceasefire now!

Jena, the co-vice president of SJP, said:

This institution is responsible for creating an environment that is including and welcoming for all students from all backgrounds. But unfortunately, the

majority of the time, that excludes the Palestinian narrative. Throughout my time here at Wayne State, I have witnessed the ways this administration has tried to silence us, our voices and our demands.

A few examples of this are the passing of the BDS resolution, that is meant to protect the ethics and the morality of Wayne State in the interest of students. Yet the Board of Governors is not responding to this moral outrage out of fear. Fear, when people are dying.

Another example of the disgusting behavior of the administration is the dean of DEI using interfaith dialogue to talk about the Palestinian genocide without actually incorporating Palestinian voices. This is not a religious issue.

The vice president of the Black Student Union said:

This type of genocidal colonialism cannot be justified, nor will we allow it to be minimized or downplayed. Justifying the loss of countless innocent lives for the actions of their government is incomprehensible and should be recognized for what it is, an illegitimate attempt to seize control of a vulnerable and marginalized population.

A representative of Jewish Students for Peace spoke in solidarity with the pro-Palestinian protesters and said the resources of WSU, such as interfaith dialogue, are being used to “minimize the genocide against Palestinians as well as to homogenize all Jewish students as Zionists falsely. We are not all Zionists. There are many anti-Zionist Jews on campus and there is a growing number day by day.”

Speaking on behalf of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, Andre Damon addressed the protest.

Damon replied to the claims by the media and political establishment that the slaughter in Gaza represented the will of the Jewish people.

“But there can be no greater slander against the Jewish people than to claim that the mass murder of women and children is in their interests. It is not the Jewish people who are responsible, but the despised Netanyahu regime and its backers in Washington, London, Berlin and Paris,” Damon said.

He warned:

The movement against Israel’s genocide stands at an inflection point. If it remains leaderless, if it remains without a firm political program, it will dissolve and dissipate. And the fate of the Palestinians will be sealed.

He concluded:

We cannot let that happen. It is time to call things by their real name: The genocide in Gaza is a crime of capitalism, that vicious system of industrial exploitation on a mass scale. It is the capitalists who profit on war. Their murder with bombs abroad is the concentrated expression of their social murder at home—through the spread of poverty, the destruction of healthcare and social services—all for their personal enrichment.

The movement against war must be based in a movement of the working class. From every corner of the wide world, the slogan must once again be heard: “Workers of the world, unite!” It is the unified strength of the working class that will stop the genocide in Gaza and overturn the capitalist system.

After the rally, a representative of SJP said that the WSU provost came down and met with her to say that the administration would not let any of the demonstrators go inside the building and shut the building for all students. After the protest, she said, campus security began checking IDs to only let individuals into the building who were deemed not part of the demonstration.

She said:

This is a university that claims that they are diverse. ... But they are denying us access to the university. The question is: Who is next? Today they discriminated against the Palestinians, tomorrow who will that be? ... This is a message to the Wayne State University administration that this is not the last you will hear from us. We do have demands and we will get them to you.



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