

“Israel is attempting to kill any chance of Palestinian freedom by killing all emblems of culture”

Police provocatively break up peaceful protest against Gaza genocide in Royal Oak, Michigan

Our reporters
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Police in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak provocatively and violently broke up a peaceful march against the escalating Israeli genocide in Palestine on Saturday called by Jewish Voices for Peace, where over 200 youth and workers, including several families with children, demonstrated.

The chants, speeches and comments by participants who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* directed their anger at the complicity of the Democratic Party leadership in the Biden administration and state, including the now ubiquitous chant “charging” Biden, Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer, and US Senators Gary Peters and Debbie Stabenow for the genocide.

After rain had thinned the protest, a major contingent of city police vehicles, some unmarked, blocked an entire street and intersection to stop the march. Police then violently pushed themselves into the crowd and arrested two protesters.

A section of the demonstrators then picketed outside the Royal Oak Police Department to demand the release of those detained. A participant at the rally told the WSWs that the police targeted the woman leading the protest after a portion of the crowd had already left and that one person was released and the other would likely be held until Monday on charges of assaulting a police officer.

Another participant told the WSWs afterward that she had gone to the police station to protest.

“The charges were bogus; they said they assaulted a police officer. There were videos showing that they didn’t.

“They had police cars all over the place. They wouldn’t tell us anything. They were shoving people. They wouldn’t give any explanations of what is going on. They would just smile with a smirk.

“The videos show the whole arrests. They said he was resisting, but he was not. I saw with my own eyes that they handcuffed Joe. He wasn’t resisting. He wasn’t doing anything. Alexis, the one leading the chants, came over to see

what was wrong and they pushed her.

“We were at the police station at for least an hour a half before they released Assad. They would not let us in.”

The police attack against marchers in Royal Oak was provocative and aimed at intimidating continuing opposition to the Israeli genocide. It is of particular significance given that the Detroit area is home to the largest Arab-American population in the US.

The incident highlights the turn of the entire political establishment to attacks on basic democratic rights like peaceful protest and free speech, indeed any challenge from below to its policy of war and genocide.

A nurse at the Royal Oak protest denounced the claims of “antisemitism” used by politicians and the corporate media to justify these policies and crackdowns of demonstrations.

“Protesting has nothing to do with religion,” she said. “We are all Christians, Muslims, Jewish people together protesting against apartheid and oppression, so it is not antisemitic. Protesting against your government and saying no to oppression and genocide has nothing to do with religion. It is a human issue.”

Several protesters were attending their first march and made clear that the official support for the mass murder of the people of Gaza is making them more conscious of the connection between US military aggression overseas and social inequality, austerity, attacks on jobs and conditions at home.

There was a strong response to the Perspective distributed by WSWs supporters at the rally on the murder of Palestinian author and poet Dr. Refaat al-Ar’eer.

“I really agree with the WSWs for the exposure of the murder of Dr. Ar’eer,” said a University of Michigan professor attending the rally. “The media is censoring and covering up this atrocious genocide. I was a fan of his poetry.”

Jo, a young worker, said, “By targeting academics such as Dr. Refaat, they are attempting to kill Palestinian voices but also

Palestinian access to life itself. Israel is attempting to kill any chance of Palestinian freedom by killing all emblems of culture. Anyone who thinks this isn't genocide is deluding themselves. This is a destruction of centuries of lives and culture. I am very emotional and care a lot about this."

She agreed with the call by the WSWs to orient to the working class and added, "To mobilize the working class we need to divest the value in the politicians that we have right now because they are not working for us. We need a new voice, a new vision of how we want the world to work."

After realizing that US representative Haley Stevens, a Democrat, had received over \$700,000 from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, she felt disillusioned. "I didn't know that and I voted for her," she said. "I've called her and emailed her countless times, and every time she sends you back an email saying that she is going to continue to support Israel's destruction of Hamas, which is really a code word for the destruction of Palestinians. And I have heard countless people say they are not going to vote for Biden."

Her friend Shawn explained, "A lot of the issues that we live with in America are all interconnected—workers' rights, what is happening now in Palestine, everything going on right now—it all has to do, to break this down very simply, with the haves and the have-nots. We, the people, deserve peace, we deserve a right to life, a right to happiness. We deserve these things, and they are being taken away en masse. You are not able to afford houses anymore, you cannot afford to take care of children and meanwhile, all of our tax dollars are being sent to kill children over in Palestine. It is unacceptable; I will not stand for it.

"This violence is not natural; it is programmed into the nature of our imperialistic, capitalistic societies. We fight wars but we can't solve climate change. It just doesn't add up."

Asked about what it will take to stop the genocide and US wars, Jo said, "Calling for a ceasefire is not enough. It has to be more than just words ... I agree with a socialist revolution. I identify as a socialist."

As soon as strikes and industrial action by the working class to stop the genocide were raised in the discussion, other demonstrators nearby expressed their agreement.

Joe, one of the demonstrators later arrested, wore a kaffiyeh scarf and held a sign denouncing the "terrorist state of Israel." He told the WSWs, "I think it will take what everybody is talking about doing on Monday, which is a worldwide strike. We have to speak their language: money. Organizing in the workplace is a good idea. But I also think that the only way it is gonna stop is if we stop it."

Another worker in the tech field said, "In my opinion these protests are the one light at the end of the tunnel.

"You can see all of this tying together. The CEOs of these companies, like at Starbucks, going against their own workers because they speak up against oppression. If someone can't see these are tied up in one big oppressive system, it is heartbreaking."

The WSWs explained the demand of socialist autoworker Will Lehman, who has called for halting military production for Israel by members of the United Auto Workers.

"The politicians have been bought and paid for," the worker said. "Their silence is not just being complicit, it is an action against the people.

"We are in a society where the capitalist class is taking all the wealth from us to begin with. It's being used against us. Many workers don't see that they are just giving their money to the rich and losing their lives in the process. Losing their families. Losing their homes. A lot of people can't afford rent at this point. This all ties together.

"What are workers going to say if they know that the things they are building are being used to hurt others around the world? It's really good to see that hundreds of thousands of autoworkers are demanding that their leadership speak up on these issues."

Tedah, a florist who attended with his family, said, "What we need to stop this is to stop sending weapons to Israel, to stop killing thousands of children and people all over Gaza. It is a genocide. They are targeting everyone. It is not only about doctors and teachers anymore. They are ethnically cleansing all Palestinians. They are killing anyone that comes in their way. As the United States does not stop helping Israel it is as complicit as Israel itself in murdering all these people."

The police repression in Royal Oak and numerous other places, as well as the witch-hunt against pro-Palestinian students and faculty on college campuses, highlights the urgent need for turning to key sections of the working class as part of an independent and international political movement to end capitalism, which is the source of war, genocide and fascism.



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