Drop the charges against anti-genocide protesters in New Orleans!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality – New Orleans
24 January 2024

The IYSSE is hosting a public meeting in New Orleans this Friday, January 26 at 6 p.m. at the First Unitarian Universalist Church on S. Claiborne Avenue, to discuss the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The meeting will explain the political program, history and socialist perspective upon which youth and workers can fight the genocide. We urge students and workers in the area to attend.

Five college students and community members in New Orleans, Louisiana face trumped up criminal charges for protesting against Israel's genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. The charges are part of the broader bipartisan crackdown against anti-genocide protests throughout the United States and internationally.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) condemns the charges and demands they be withdrawn. Moreover, we demand that Tulane and Loyola universities, along with the New Orleans Police Department and other law enforcement agencies, cease their repression and intimidation of student protests against the genocide.

Since the start of Israel's genocidal war last October, which has been given full political and material support by the Biden administration and the entire United States government, student protesters have faced a massive campaign against their democratic rights through an alliance of the state, the financial oligarchy, the military and Zionist forces which seek to suppress all opposition to the genocide. Their aim is to terrorize anti-war students into silence.

At university campuses across the country, student groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace have been banned and student protesters have been doxxed, blacklisted and even violently assaulted by Zionist forces. Most recently, former Israeli Defense Force soldiers sprayed protesters at Columbia University with a "non-lethal" chemical spray (Skunk), a malodorous crowd-control weapon that has put at least 10 students in the hospital.

The criminal charges against the New Orleans protesters are part of this right-wing campaign and must be opposed by youth and workers as part of the defense of democratic rights.

A student-led protest last October drew students from both Tulane and Loyola universities and took place on a public sidewalk that intersects Tulane's campus. Despite intimidation from the university administration and Zionist forces on campus, the protest drew over a hundred people. Following a provocation by Zionist counter-protesters, a brief altercation erupted and led to multiple arrests of pro-Palestinian protesters, but no Zionists were arrested.

Three protesters—a Loyola student, a Jewish community member and a Palestinian business owner and father—have been charged with simple battery. Another Palestinian activist was charged with a felony hate crime.

A Tulane student faces graffiti and hate crime charges for spray painting the common chant "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" on campus, with Tulane president Michael Fitts calling it "antisemitic vandalism." Central to the campaign to intimidate and suppress opposition to Israel's genocide has been the slanderous lie that opposition to genocide and to Zionism constitute "antisemitism."

The protest organizers noted in a social media post about the arrests that a Zionist student who was involved in the altercation faces no charges. Moreover, the crowd of Zionists, who shouted at the pro-Palestinian protesters to "go to Gaza and get bombed" and called them "terrorists," faced no condemnation from the university administration.

Tulane University is one of over a dozen schools under investigation by the Department of Education for "violations" of the Civil Rights Act, including alleged antisemitism. These investigations, most of which followed student protests against the genocide, are part of the McCarthyite witch-hunt against left-wing political opposition on college campuses, prosecuted by the Biden administration and the Democratic Party in alliance with actual antisemites and fascists within the Republican Party.

Over the last three months, the response of the Tulane University administration has been entirely in line with the demands of Washington.

In a statement issued on October 12, Fitts stated, "I unequivocally condemn the attacks by Hamas on Israel and all forms of terrorism and hate. … My thoughts remain with the Jewish community in the wake of these attacks. I grieve with them and all who were shocked, angered and appalled by these atrocities and unimaginable brutality."

Following the first protest, Fitts announced that Tulane would

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escalate the “security presence” on campus and drew upon a “coalition of federal, state and local” law enforcement, including the Department of Homeland Security, to intimidate a second student-organized protest.

In the more than 100 days of Israel’s war crimes in Gaza, the genocidal character of which is indisputable under international law and is coupled with explicitly genocidal statements from within the Israeli government and military, Fitts has not issued a single statement denouncing Israel’s mass slaughter, which has killed at least 25,000 people, 70 percent of whom are children and women. Nor has he denounced Israel’s systematic bombing of hospitals, universities and refugee camps, which has forced 1.9 million people, or 85 percent of the population, to flee their homes.

Fitts’s hypocritical invocation of “the rights and safety of all” in justifying an expanded police presence on campus and his denunciations of protesters as violent, while implicitly defending and condoning the violence of Zionists against protesters, shows that the university is not concerned with campus safety but is attempting to intimidate students into silence. At Tulane, like at universities throughout the US, students who speak out against the genocide in Gaza face the risk of losing scholarships, internships and job opportunities, in addition to personal harassment, violence and even criminal charges.

Tulane’s ties with the military-intelligence apparatus

Like every major university, Tulane is closely integrated with the capitalist state, the financial oligarchy and the military. Its board of directors is composed of representatives of the American ruling class, including mega-millionaire private equity managers and corporate CEOs, such as current Chair Carol Levin Bernick, CEO of Polished Nickel Capital Management and Chair-Elect David Mussafer, Chairman of Advent International Corporation.

Other current board members include Regina M. Benjamin, former Surgeon General of the United States under Barack Obama, Lisa P. Jackson, former Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency and businesswoman Suzanne B. Grant, treasurer of the Zionist Jewish Federation of North America which, according to its website, partners with “the Government of Israel and a variety of agencies to secure the Jewish State.”

Tulane is also deeply integrated with the American military and intelligence agencies. It is a partner of the National Guard Bureau Homeland Security Institute, which offers masters degrees to military service personnel in the fields of Homeland Security Studies and, as of last year, is a member of the US Strategic Command Academic Alliance. The US Strategic Command (US STRATCOM) oversees the United States’ nuclear arsenal, and its Air Force service component, the Air Force Global Strike Command, is headquartered at the Barksdale Air Force Base in northwest Louisiana.

The deep-going ties between academic institutions and American imperialism, in which universities directly serve the interests of the military, corporations and the state, is incompatible with academic freedom and the preservation of democratic rights on campuses. The past three months have demonstrated the profound degree to which university policy, including curriculum and campus discourse, is shaped by the interests of the ruling class, not those of the broad mass of students and youth in the United States.

For the American ruling class, the genocide in Gaza is a necessary component of the broader strategy of a new imperialist redivision of the world in which US imperialism intends to maintain its declining world hegemony. The Biden administration’s escalation of war in the Middle East with the bombing of Yemen, which aims to draw Iran into a direct conflict, as well as its ongoing proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and its far-advanced plans for war against China are all different fronts in a new emerging third world war.

Under these conditions, the American ruling class, which exerts vast control over American universities, cannot tolerate any interruption to its plans. This is the class policy that underlies the suppression of the protests against Israel’s genocide on campuses and the broader attack against democratic rights.

On these fundamental questions, the Biden Administration and Democratic Party are united with the fascistic Republican Party, who they have partnered with in order to fund and arm Israel’s genocide as well as crack down on opposition at home. Biden’s claim to be defending “American democracy” against the would-be dictator Trump stands entirely exposed, as do any political tendencies which sow illusions in the ability to “pressure” or reform the Democratic Party.

The fight to stop this genocide, the threat of a third world war and dictatorship require a fight against capitalism itself.

As the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) explained in its December statement condemning the witch-hunt on college campuses, ending the genocide and threat of war require that the protest movement turn to the growing struggles by the only revolutionary force in society that is capable of overthrowing capitalism and building socialism, the international working class.

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