

A day after mass arrests, Columbia students continue protest against Gaza genocide

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Protests continued at Columbia University for a third straight day Friday following the mass arrest of 108 students in a failed attempt to silence opponents of Israel's genocide in Gaza. Hundreds of students continued to rally on campus around the South Lawn, where a protest encampment was destroyed by New York Police Department (NYPD) riot cops the previous day. Protests also continued outside the university gates, which have been sealed off to all those not directly affiliated with the university.

Not satisfied with the results of the mass arrest, Columbia continued its brutal crackdown. Students participating in the peaceful "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" have not only been arrested and charged with trespassing, but Columbia has also moved forward with suspending them from the university, banning them from campus, evicting them from campus housing and confiscating belongings left at the encampment.

The police raid of the campus was set off after a McCarthyite congressional hearing Tuesday in which Columbia President Nemat Shafik eagerly demonstrated her willingness to censor and intimidate students and faculty opposing the genocide.

Under the bogus guise of opposing antisemitism, the Democrats, together with fascistic Republicans, have sought to make an example of university presidents deemed insufficiently aggressive in snuffing out opposition to Washington's war aims. University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill and Harvard President Claudine Gay were the first casualties after previous hearings in December.

With the genocidal assault on Gaza now involving direct confrontation with Iran, merging with the escalating war against Russia in Ukraine and threats against China, the ruling class is further intensifying its assault on democratic rights. Campuses around the country are moving forward with banning protests, firing pro-Palestinian faculty and expelling students who continue to oppose the US-backed assault on Gaza.

However, resistance to these police state measures is also spreading. On Friday, hundreds of Yale students began an occupation of Beinecke Plaza to demand the university

divest all ties to Israeli weapon manufacturing. Students at Boston University participated in a walkout Friday in solidarity with Columbia students who were arrested. At Miami University (Ohio) and the University of North Carolina, students erected their own Gaza solidarity encampments.

The widespread opposition to the attack on students at Columbia is also reverberating among faculty. A statement of Columbia and Barnard chapters of the American Association of University Professors posted Friday affirmed "continued support for our students' right to protest and to speak freely, and for our colleagues' right to teach and to write freely within their domains of expertise. We have lost confidence in our president and administration, and we pledge to fight to reclaim our University."

A letter signed by dozens of Public Interest Honorees of Columbia Law School condemned the administration's repression of pro-Palestinian students and faculty and repudiated their titles. The letter stated:

A university that suppresses dissent, free expression and academic inquiry, while betraying the principles of human rights and international law, places itself squarely on the wrong side of history and has no standing to give out lessons or awards in human rights. Therefore, we, the undersigned, withdraw our consent to display our names, images, and work on Columbia websites, promotional materials, or donor appeals, and decline to participate in events hosted by Columbia Law School and Columbia University until the ... student-led demands are met.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in New York participated in the student protests outside Columbia Friday, which began at

Frederick Douglass Circle Plaza and marched into the street, blocking traffic, to the University. On the way, NYPD had dozens of police cars out with sirens blaring and shouting at protesters to get off the street and threatening arrests. The protesters held their ground while yelling chants such as, “Joe Biden is a war criminal.”

Once the protest arrived at the Broadway and 116th Street entrance of Columbia, dozens of police in riot gear kettled the crowd of a few hundred into a narrow area on the sidewalk lined with police barricades. Students and activists gave speeches to the crowd through a call-and-response method to amplify the speakers’ words due to the NYPD’s ban on amplified sounds at protests.

One student speaker said, “We are on the right side of history...This institution is so afraid of our message, both inside and outside of its walls, that it deploys a fascist police force to repress the voices of the majority of the world. This institution is a training ground for the ruling class. And the students have messed up its plans.”

Another protester, who spoke with the IYSSE, remarked, “I think [the NYPD raid Thursday] is a direct reflection of the fascism that runs within our college’s administration. I think that what is happening with college students and student activists in general is reprehensible, and it should not be condoned in any way. People who come out here are doing so because they’re of conscience, and they’re doing what’s right.”

Asked about the role of the Democratic Party, he responded, “I think it shows that regardless of whatever party is in power, there is still an imperialist regime. And the different players within the political field—Mayor Eric Adams and other Democratic Party-affiliated officials—they’re just as much a part of the genocide that is happening right now as any.”

In a statement delivered at the protest on Friday, IYSSE representative Karsten Schneider stressed:

The genocide in Gaza cannot be understood outside of its place in an emerging third world war. US imperialism is desperate to redivide the world. It aims to subjugate Russia in Ukraine, Iran in the Middle East and, ultimately, China. The pursuit of this war is incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

Appeals to the Democratic Party are a dead end and can only lead to the demoralization and isolation of the protests. The fight in defense of democratic rights and against imperialist war and genocide must expand beyond the campuses. It must be rooted in the working class, independent of the

Democrats and the union bureaucracies, waged through the means of class struggle and based on a revolutionary socialist program.

The IYSSE, the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), is intervening in the protests to fight for an orientation of the movement against the genocide to the working class. Many of the political forces dominating the protests at present base themselves on conceptions that the Democratic Party can be pressured into reforms if only the protests can grow.

SEP candidate for US President Joseph Kishore explained in a statement on the Columbia events the type of political perspective that is needed:

The SEP asserts that the defense of democratic rights and opposition to war must be based in the working class, which produces all of society’s wealth and therefore has the power to counter the reactionary conspiracies of the capitalist oligarchs. War abroad is at the same time a war on the working class at home.

The SEP calls on workers to mobilize and demand an end to the persecution of students. The youth cannot fight this battle alone! They require the support of the working class as a whole. We endorse the call by Palestinian trade unions to stop production and the delivery of arms to Israel. We encourage working class action, including strikes and protests, to defend democratic rights and oppose the genocide.

We call on students to turn to the working class, to take the fight against the genocide and the attack on democratic rights to the factories and workplaces. It is there that the social power exists to stop the genocide, stop the wars and end the imperialist-capitalist system!



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