

# Biden's campus crackdown: The Democratic Party bares its fangs, again

Tom Mackaman  
26 April 2024

Over the past few days, America's college campuses have been turned into scenes of violent police attacks on students. Young people peacefully demonstrating against the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza—in just its sixth month already one of history's ghastliest crimes—have been arrested by the score, perhaps 1,000 in all.

Police have been deployed in combat gear and on horseback. Snipers have been arrayed on campus buildings. Cops have tased students. At Emory University, professors protecting students have been violently arrested.

Had these scenes taken place in, say, Iran, there would be wall-to-wall coverage in the American media and demands for "humanitarian intervention" to protect the protesters. But this is America. So the media and the politicians denounce the students peacefully protesting against mass murder as "antisemites." The crude, transparent amalgam is that opposition to Israel's ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians is antisemitism.

The propaganda and the police crackdown are organized from the Oval Office. Asked about the demonstrations at a press conference Monday, April 22, Biden said, "I condemn the antisemitic protests." A day earlier, Biden issued a press release stating that "Antisemitism is reprehensible and has no place on college campuses."

He announced the creation of a new police bureaucracy to monitor the campuses, called by the Orwellian name "National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism," and promised to put "the full force of the federal government behind protecting the Jewish community."

Biden's alleged concern over antisemitism is exposed by the fact that, in smashing opposition to Israel's genocide, the White House works hand-in-glove with *actual* antisemites of the Republican Party, including advocates of the "Great Replacement Theory," which holds that there is a Jewish plot to eliminate white Christians from America. And Biden has transferred endless billions of dollars worth of killing machines to a government in Ukraine that celebrates as its greatest national hero Stepan Bandera, whose Ukrainian followers enlisted in Hitler's mass murder of eastern European Jews.

Of course, extraordinary efforts will be made to separate Biden from his own policy and to promote the absurd fiction

that somehow he can be made to "hear" the very protests he is trying to crush. This is the specialty of organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America, which is, in fact, only a faction within the Democratic Party.

But the reality of what the Biden administration is and what it is prepared to do—to destroy democracy in the name of saving it—arises not from what its left hangers-on wish to believe about it. It emerges from the class interests the Democratic Party actually represents, and, indeed, from that party's entire history.

It is the oldest capitalist electoral party in the world. While certain of its longstanding characteristics had emerged already by the Civil War—for example, its promotion of racial ideology to manipulate the working class—the *modern* Democratic Party came into itself at a point roughly midway between the Age of Jackson in the 1820s and 1830s and the Biden administration today, during the administration of Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921).

It was at that moment that the Democratic Party emerged as the preferred party of American imperialism. This is borne out by the fact that for decades every major war was initiated with a Democrat in the White House: World War I (Wilson); World War II (Franklin Roosevelt); the Korean War (Truman); and the Vietnam War (Kennedy and Johnson).

These large wars necessitated the shifting of the economy and the disciplining of the workforce. In this, the crucial role was always played by the labor bureaucracy, which, to borrow a phrase from Trotsky, "fell into the steel embrace of the imperialist state" in the US through the Democratic Party precisely at moments of war.

Samuel Gompers of the AFL attempted to render this service to Wilson during World War I, and Walter Reuther of the UAW (along with several other union heads) did the same for Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson. Shawn Fain of the UAW is busy auditioning for this role at present.

The big wars of the 20th century also demanded the imposition of a militaristic culture that sought to control political speech and thought. The substantially greater influence the Democrats have wielded among the liberal intelligentsia and the entertainment industry has made them more useful for this purpose than the Republicans. As Randolph Bourne put it

in 1917 during World War I, it was the role of the intellectuals to open “the sluices” that “flood us with the sewage of the war spirit.”

But the allegiance of the union bureaucracy and the intellectuals to imperialist war, deliverable only by the Democratic Party, has always had a darker side—out and out repression. In the Vietnam War, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations dramatically expanded the secret COINTELPRO organization, which had as its main goal the disruption of antiwar organizations.

In World War II, the Roosevelt administration used the Smith Act to outlaw domestic opposition to the war, prosecuting for sedition almost the entire leadership of the Socialist Workers Party—with the notable exception of Joseph Hansen, who was later revealed to be an FBI informer.

But the precedent for all that was to follow was the massive operation by the Wilson administration to quash resistance to World War I. His Espionage Act, still on the books and likely the basis for any prosecution of Julian Assange, effectively made opposition to the war illegal by asserting that such activity interfered with the operations of the military. The Espionage Act was used to prosecute and jail Eugene Debs, the founding figure of American socialism, for opposing US entry into the war in his famous Canton Speech.

Under the Espionage Act and kindred laws enacted at the state level, hundreds of socialists and labor militants were jailed. The foreign language press was required to submit to the Postmaster General translated copies of all of its publications. The Wilson administration effectively deputized a mass vigilante organization, called the American Protective League, which carried out violent attacks on labor strikes and radical organizations.

Such tactics continued after the war, led and organized by the American Legion and the Ku Klux Klan. Immigrant radicals were especially targeted, with Wilson’s “Palmer Raids” rounding up thousands and deporting hundreds in the months after the war.

The crucial issue that confronted Wilson, and which today confronts Biden, is preventing a convergence of the working class with opposition to war. In spite of Gompers’ efforts, Wilson faced the largest strike wave in American history. Over one million workers walked off their jobs in 1917 and 1918, and 4.5 million struck in 1919. At the same time, the Bolshevik Revolution took power in Russia, and under Lenin and Trotsky declared “war on war.” Under these conditions, Wilson’s program of repression was a desperate effort, only partially successful, to head off the influence of socialism on the working class.

Like the Wilson administration before it, the Biden White House seeks to block opposition to war that it fears will merge with the gathering movement of the working class. But Biden does so under very different conditions.

In Wilson’s day, American capitalism was ascendant. No

longer. For decades, American capitalism has sought to offset its long-term economic decline by asserting ever more violently its military dominance.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Washington and its proxies have waged an uninterrupted series of wars: Iraq, Somalia, Serbia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Gaza, to name the bloodiest. The wars have killed and displaced millions, cost trillions of dollars, and poisoned American culture and intellectual life. Yet they have only accelerated American economic decline, lately raising questions over the status of the dollar as world reserve currency.

And it is now clear that these wars—which form an arc around Eurasia with a geographical center in the Middle East—have been preparatory for a Third World War, which is in fact already in its initial stages.

As we noted in a recent Perspective column commenting on Biden’s signing into law another massive tranche of war funding:

By linking together in a single piece of legislation the war spending for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, the bill signifies that the Biden administration and the US ruling elite as a whole do not view these conflicts as separate and distinct. They are, rather, connected theaters in a global war. American imperialism is fighting on a vast front which stretches from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea, then through the Middle East and Central Asia, all the way to China and the Pacific.

Between the Democrats and Republicans, there are no differences over principle, only how the program of world domination should be presented and rolled out.

It is therefore a matter of pressing urgency for youth protesting the genocide to draw the necessary political conclusions and break once and for all with the Democratic Party and those political forces grouped around it. They must consciously turn to the revolutionary force that has both the means and the motivation to end war and the capitalist system that breeds it—the American and international working class.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**