

Canadian students at McGill University defy threats of state repression

Our reporters
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Following the example of students in the United States, Europe, and Australia, students at McGill University's downtown Montreal campus set up an encampment Saturday to oppose the Israeli regime's genocide against the Palestinians and Canadian imperialism's complicity in it. Representatives of the political establishment and university administration have responded furiously, urging the deployment of ruthless state repression to crush the peaceful protest.

The encampment was initiated by students who set up two dozen tents on Saturday and quickly won enthusiastic support from students at other universities and local residents. Seeking to discredit the protest but inadvertently acknowledging the widespread support it enjoys, McGill's administration wrote in a statement Monday, "The number of individuals who have set up tents on campus has tripled since Saturday. We have become aware that many of them, if not the majority, are not members of the McGill community."

Invoking the catch-all justification for the brutal suppression by the Canadian ruling establishment of opposition to the genocide in Gaza since October 2023, the university asserted that it had seen "antisemitic language and intimidating behaviour" at the protest camp, without providing a shred of evidence to back this up. Making an ominous threat, the university added that the protesters violate both the university's policies as well as the law.

Higher Education Minister in the right-wing chauvinist Quebec government Pascale Déry gave her stamp of approval Sunday to a state-led crackdown on the encampment. She said that the "state" is "very preoccupied and concerned about the situation on campus because we've seen what happened in the last couple weeks and days in the United States and Europe."

Déry confirmed that she is in regular contact with Public Security Minister François Bonnardel so that the

situation does not "get out of control." In other words, Francois Legault's Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) government wants the same police state measures used in the US, where hundreds of arrests have been made, and in Germany, where close to a thousand cops stormed and violently dispersed a Palestine Congress in Berlin April 12.

Students are demanding that the university divest from Israeli companies and speak out against the genocide. A statement from a protest organizer sent to CBC called for McGill and Concordia universities to "divest from funds implicated in the Zionist state as well as [cut] ties with Zionist academic institutions." The organizers cited 50 companies financed by McGill that are "complicit in upholding the apartheid regime of Israel." One of the organizers said Sunday that students plan to remain indefinitely.

Two students who spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters expressed opposition to their tuition fees being used to fund military research that benefits the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which has committed one war crime after the other in Gaza. In one of the most recent atrocities, over 300 bodies were uncovered in mass graves at Khan Younis' Nasser hospital. Many had gunshot wounds to the head and their hands tied behind their backs, unmistakable signs of mass executions.

"It's utterly hypocritical for classes at McGill to teach students about settler colonialism in Canada, while the university supports Israel's genocide of the Palestinians," one student told the WSWs, adding, "it is important that students are willing to sacrifice and face police repression in order to call attention to this genocide and protest the government's complicity."

The hardline stance adopted by the provincial government and university administration is fully backed by the federal Liberal government. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government has backed Israel's genocide to

the hilt, including by sending millions of dollars of weaponry and other military equipment to the fascistic Netanyahu regime following Hamas' attack on October 7. It has spearheaded a nationwide crackdown against pro-Palestine protests and other actions.

Liberal MP Anthony Housefather issued a statement Saturday night just hours after the encampment was established to demand its violent dispersal. "I call upon the McGill administration in public, as I have in private, to make sure this encampment is removed, according to their own rules," he said.

The disgust at Canadian imperialism's complicity in the Gaza genocide felt by those participating in the McGill encampment is shared by millions of people across Canada. Hundreds of thousands have participated in weekly protests in all major cities since the IDF's bloody onslaught on Gaza began almost seven months ago.

At a recent protest in Toronto, several participants voiced their opposition to the genocide to WSWS reporters.

Gus, a young demonstrator, rejected any suggestion that the ruling class can stop the genocide. "I don't really believe our government will do what needs to be done," he said. "I think we've always been on the wrong side of history since this country was established.

"The more people that we accumulate, the more we can stop the gears, even if it's for a day, a week."

Todd is a worker in the manufacturing industry whose family survived the Holocaust. He spoke passionately about Zionism's crimes and the hypocrisy of the trade union-New Democratic Party-backed federal Liberal government.

"We just have to end the occupation," he commented. "This is ridiculous!...We're giving money to Ukraine, we're giving money to Israel. When you commit a genocide, the American government, the Canadian government, they reward you!

"What's Canada gonna do in the future for all their homeless? All I hear is they want to buy submarines and all this crazy stuff. So, it just makes me angry. The Palestinians want freedom, just like everyone else."

Grazyna, a demonstrator from Eastern Europe, remarked, "A lot of western corporations are coming to Eastern Europe to exploit people, including the bigger corporations, Amazon and others. I'm originally from Poland, and they're organizing against them. People are now more aware. There is a lot of solidarity with other oppressed people around the world.

"It's happening. That's a good sign of globalization.

Not only the oppressors are globalized, but also the oppressed. They're able to unite."

Taking up this theme, Mark, another demonstrator, explained, "Everyone needs to do what they can. Just because you're a worker in a Western country doesn't mean that you're safe. If you belong to a minority or you belong to the working class, you are not safe. And I think Palestinian liberation is tied to liberation of everyone everywhere."

Jesse, a high school student, attended the demonstration with his friend. "I think Israel is in the wrong," he said. "I don't know why anyone would ever think that they're right. We have some people at school who are very pro-Israel. There's someone who goes around calling himself a Zionist. I don't understand how you could even think that at all. The Israeli government is using the initial attack by Hamas as an excuse for the genocide, to bomb hospitals.

"A lot of people at our school support Palestine. Most people. But there's a vocal minority of people who support Israel, and it's unfortunate. It's a small, very vocal minority."

He pointed to the connection between Canadian imperialism's support for genocide and war abroad and growing social problems at home. "A very obvious issue today is inequality," he said. "Growing up in Toronto, I realized it's a rich get richer, poor get poorer kind of thing, and the cost of living is so high. I was working a minimum-wage job over the summer, and I realized there's no way you can just live off minimum wage.

"I never had to walk miles and miles to go to school like my grandpa would always tell me. He worked three jobs. That still exists today. People still can't make a living."

Turning to the super-rich, he added, "These people are making more than we will ever see in our lives."



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