

Northwestern University encampment organizers end anti-genocide protest, provoking widespread opposition: “I hope the other encampments do not follow suit”

Our reporters
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On Monday afternoon, organizers of the student encampment at Northwestern University (NU) in the north suburb of Chicago reached an agreement behind closed doors with the university administration and shut down the protest against the genocide in Gaza.

The move was widely denounced by students and supporters, even as a similar encampment was set up at the University of Chicago on Monday morning. Over the past week, thousands of students have protested across the Chicago region against the US-backed Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Protests and walkouts against genocide have broken out at multiple other Chicago universities and colleges, including Roosevelt University, Loyola University, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbia College and others. The latest protest encampment was set up Tuesday morning at DePaul University.

Northwestern’s administration put out a statement that the organizers of the protest agreed to end the encampment in return for practically nothing. The statement issued by Michael Schill (president of Northwestern), Kathleen Hagerty (provost) and Susan Davis (vice president of student affairs) read: “We have reached an agreement with a group of students and faculty who represent the majority of the protestors on Deering Meadow to bring the demonstration into compliance with University rules and policies.”

In fact, these decisions were arrived at completely undemocratically. A small layer of students with the Northwestern University Divestment Coalition came to an agreement with the administration, which has also been shared and endorsed by SJP Chicago.

In exchange for ending the encampment, the university

offered pro forma to discuss its investments with the divestment coalition, a promise that itself is highly conditional. Even the limited goals of a previous joint resolution by various student groups, including Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace, to continue the encampment until all university investments with the Israeli government have been abandoned was dropped.

The previous resolution included demands for NU to end its Israel Innovation Project (IIP), an institutional partnership with Israeli research institutions focusing on the sciences including chemistry, computer science and AI, renewable energy, neurobiology and materials science. The IIP is planning to host a conference at Northwestern May 8 and 9 focused on water resource management.

Northwestern dispensed further crumbs, including restarting an advisory committee on investment responsibility in the fall. Additionally, it claimed to “support visiting Palestinian faculty and students at risk” by funding two faculty members and giving full tuition to five Palestinian undergraduates. Northwestern also agreed to provide Muslim students with a “temporary space” and to renovate a MENA (Middle East and North Africa)/Muslim house on campus.

More importantly, Northwestern has made clear it intends to enforce harsher limits on the activities of students and community members, stating, “Only Northwestern students, faculty and staff will be allowed in the demonstration area, except if otherwise authorized by the University. The University and student representatives will work to maintain safety and ensure participation in the demonstration area is limited to University community

members and allows for other reserved events to occur on Deering Meadow... The above applies to Deering Meadow. All other demonstrations on campus must also comply with University policies.”

This rotten sellout agreement was met with an outpouring of anger by students and workers on Northwestern University Divestment Coalition’s Instagram account and other social media.

One student wrote, “Were your demands a space for MENA/Muslim students? Really? in the middle of a genocide??” Another person added on the joint working groups between the student organization and Northwestern: “I was part of working groups in undergrad. THEY DO NOTHING. They’re waiting for all you troublemakers to graduate in four years and keep the working groups trudging until everyone is tired.”

A worker in the community denounced the agreement policing community members participating in the protests: “ALSO the whole only NU approved people in protests—there were whole families there. Parents with their kids. Babies in strollers. Palestinian flags everywhere and music and song. To be okay with just putting that all away for a MENA house open to only NU students, some scholarships for students who are lucky enough to survive the daily bombings, ugh. I don’t get it.”

Another person denounced the leaders of the divestment coalition, “Y’all just said the other day ‘As we continue to organize, disrupt, escalate on university campuses and beyond, let’s not lose sight of what is unfolding in Gaza.’ What did you think those words mean? This is complacency in the belly of a violent colonial beast. We have an objective to free Palestine and we will not be negotiating with oppressors.”

Another said, “With all due respect to the individuals who put their hearts and souls into this movement FIRST AND FOREMOST for Palestinians and the people who have faced and continue to face the worst of human-inflicted atrocities in Gaza, this resolution does nothing to change the status quo for Palestinians in Palestine. I know how hard it is to stand up to the system, and sustaining the effort takes a lot of resources. But the community is here and ready to fight with those resources. This non-resolution came too soon and set a terrible precedent for other movements.”

“Unless I’m missing something this seems completely awful?” another commenter said. “Relinquishing all leverage and putting an expiration date on the protest in exchange for administrative lip service? I hope the other

encampments do not follow suit.”

It is critical that students at Northwestern and across Chicago oppose this sellout agreement. The strategy, program and perspective of anti-war protests are increasingly critical questions. Behind the coordinated crackdown and repression of students at campuses across the country is the Biden administration and the Democratic Party, deeply nervous that the student protests against war will fuse with the struggles of the working class against intolerable levels of exploitation.

Northwestern students can oppose this closed-door agreement and appeal to all students, faculty and university staff to expand the fight, not shut it down. They should turn outward to the working class in Chicagoland, appeal directly to workers in manufacturing, logistics, education, healthcare and beyond to defend them and to fuse the anti-war struggle with the growing movement of workers against capitalism, war, fascism and inequality.

As the Socialist Equality Party’s 2024 US presidential candidate Joseph Kishore noted in a statement on X/Twitter: “This battle ... cannot be waged on campuses alone. It must be taken into the working class, which has the social power to oppose imperialism and whose social interests are in conflict with the entire capitalist system.”

He added, “The Socialist Equality Party election campaign calls on students and faculty on every campus to turn out to the factories and workplaces. We call on workers to denounce the attack on students and organize protests to demand an end to the repression. The fight against the genocide in Gaza must be developed as a fight of the international working class against imperialism and the capitalist system.”

Kishore spoke at the Northwestern encampment on Saturday morning making precisely this appeal to students, before speaking at a meeting later in the afternoon in Chicago entitled, “The Gaza Genocide, War and the Fight for Socialism.”



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