Mass arrests after DSA-backed Mayor Brandon Johnson deploys Chicago police SWAT against peaceful anti-genocide protesters

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As part of the nation-wide crackdown on opponents of the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, this past weekend, heavily armed Chicago police, including SWAT elements, from a department overseen by Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson, conducted mass arrests of peaceful protesters. As of this writing, at least 68 people were arrested in connection with the protest.

In solidarity with dozens of campus encampments across the United States, and internationally, on Saturday morning, May 4, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) students and supporters established a small encampment of about 12 tents on the north garden of the Art Institute in downtown Chicago. They called the encampment "Hind's Garden," after Hind Rajab, a 6-year-old girl murdered, along with her family and healthcare workers, by the Israel Defense Forces on January 29.

Shortly after the encampment was set up—which was greeted warmly by supporters and passersby—police were deployed to the school. Upon arriving, dozens of cops with the Chicago Police Department formed a line to separate those inside the encampment from supporters outside on Michigan Avenue, who chanted the demand, "Hands off our students!" and "Disclose! Divest! We will not stop; we will not rest!"

As protesters and their supporters peacefully chanted, more police officers were dispatched to the school. Within two hours of the encampments' establishment, police issued warnings ordering demonstrators to move or disperse. By 3:30 p.m., an extraordinarily large Chicago police force, including SWAT and other tactical teams brought in from other districts, moved into the garden.

As a line of cops closed in on the encampment, demonstrators locked arms and attempted to block their entry. Police then moved in, shoving protesters violently to the ground, zip-tying their hands behind their backs and carrying them off as hundreds of police milled around the gardens.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, 68 people were arrested and charged with criminal trespass and released on Sunday.

Following the arrests, the Art Institute administration issued a statement attempting to justify the overwhelming use of police force by claiming a student had shoved a security guard and taken his keys to the museum. But this is simply cover for all involved, who are intimately tied to the state, which is controlled by the capitalist class and directed toward its war aims.

For the overwhelming and brutal police response, Mayor Johnson, former Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) staffer and Cook County Commissioner, earned denunciations from many who once supported him. Johnson campaigned on certain promises of police reform, but his first year in office has exposed his "progressive" and Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) supporters.

Since assuming office, Johnson has advanced an openly right-wing policing strategy, defended horrific detainment conditions for Latin American migrants with open xenophobia, and initiated a series of police

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crackdowns on anti-genocide protests in the weeks leading up to the Democratic National Convention, to be held in Chicago in August.

In his current role, the Bernie Sanders-endorsed mayor is leading an assault on civil and democratic rights on behalf of the Biden administration.

After the vicious police assault on SAIC students, Johnson's former floor leader, DSA alderman Carlos Ramirez Rosa, could only issue an apologetic statement : "I am deeply disappointed by CPD's actions today and find CPD's escalation inconsistent with this mayoral administration's commitment to free speech and peaceable assembly. Corrective action must be taken. Students and all people have a right to assemble and protest."

In a vain attempt to insulate Johnson from criticism and discredit the protests, the DSA-associated "progressive staffers" of the Mayor's Office issued a statement, tweeting: "Important to note that the Art Institute called the police & requested the garden cleared out. Mayors team was down there trying to deescalate & reason. Students refused to negotiate even after Palestinian organizations advised against this action & they had no Palestinians in leadership. They were offered an alternative location to set up an encampment at the Art Institute, no arrests, start divestment conversations and no disciplinary action but they refused & said they'd rather get arrested. Facts matter. This was on private property & the blame lays solely on the Art Institute. They chose to arrest their students. The Mayor did not make that call."

This statement was greeted with outrage on social media. "Shame on you this is a completely inaccurate framing of the protest and shame on the mayor," one person wrote. Another noted that Johnson had previously pledged not to use police against protesters unless there was violence, "There wasn't any violence. So what is the mayor doing?"

The brutal police assault on a small encampment of students and peaceful protesters at SAIC is part of a series of coordinated police assaults on the anti-genocide campus protests led by the Biden White House. Just three days earlier, Biden denounced the protests as violent and antisemitic, virtually indemnifying police and state forces as well as Zionist and fascist provocateurs who have attacked encampments and assaulted students over the weekend.

On Friday, the encampment at University of Chicago was rushed by Zionists and fascists after University President Paul Alivisatos issued the following statement, "On Monday, I stated that we would only intervene if what might have been an exercise of free expression blocks the learning or expression of others or substantially disrupts the functioning or safety of the university. Without an agreement to end the encampment, we have reached that point." A large police presence, both University of Chicago police and CPD, were later on the quad. Only after Alivisatos' statement, counter protesters arrived with American and Israeli flags calling for the encampment to be shut down.

On Sunday, an encampment at DePaul University was assailed by a violent counterprotest. Somewhere between 50-100 Zionists carrying Israeli and US flags chanted for several hours. Two pro-Palestinian students reportedly were injured after being hit repeatedly with flagpoles and paramedics were called to the scene.

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