

In response to mass arrests of students protesting genocide

Wayne State University faculty members say: “Hands off students!”

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In a statement published on April 30, over 100 faculty members at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit denounced the “McCarthyite repression against students on campuses across the United States” and violent police attacks on free speech. Established in 1868 in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the major urban university has long been at the heart of Detroit’s intellectual and cultural life.

The joint statement published on April 30 condemned the “actions of university officials in perpetrating violence against students” who were advocating for divestment from Zionist Israel at a WSU Board of Governors (BOG) meeting on April 26.

We particularly condemn President Kimberly Espy and the Board of Governors, who looked on silently as a large group of ... students were assaulted and violated by campus police and security.

We note that Wayne State’s actions occurred amid a national context in which students, staff, and faculty are targeted in vicious attacks on campuses across the country. These attacks include mass arrests, unfettered repression and violence, and even the threat to shoot and kill those who exercise their academic freedom and 1st Amendment rights.

It also noted that WSU police officers “including Police Chief Anthony Holt, have trained in Israel.” The faculty members concluded:

We will not allow those in charge to continue their escalatory attacks on Wayne State students. We demand that President Espy and the Board of Governors issue a clear and unequivocal apology to the students, protect academic freedom, and commit to prevent police violence against students, faculty, and community members in the future.

HANDS OFF THE STUDENTS.

On April 29, a group of more than 80 urban planning professionals, students, professors and alumni from around the country also released a letter denouncing the violent attacks on students. It was addressed to WSU Urban Studies and Planning Department Chair Rayman Mohamed, who is also the president of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, as well as the national heads of the Planning Accreditation Board and the

American Planning Association.

The lead signer was KC Caffray, a Masters in Urban Planning candidate at Wayne State, who was joined by many other WSU grad students, lecturers, alums and faculty. The letter calls on the professional organizations of urban planners to speak out against “the violent arrests and continued threats by our accredited institutions.”

Planning is inherently political, and as such, requires the public forum. Images of students occupying their university’s public spaces as armed men hovered above them with long-range guns is heartbreaking. In 200 days, nearly 85 percent of Gaza’s population has been displaced, and over 14,000 children have been killed. There is not a single university left standing in Gaza.

Our institutions are intellectually and financially intertwined with the Genocide against the Palestinian people, and for decades, students on campuses in the United States and globally, have been demanding for their universities to Divest from war. This demand should not be controversial. If we are to continue to practice planning that is rooted in democratic participation and equity, we must be clear in denouncing the behaviors of each university that have brought physical violence to members of its academic community and call into question the planning accreditation if their response continues to escalate.

Finally, on May 3, the Wayne Academic Union, affiliated with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) also condemned the “militarized response by institutional leaders” and the “politically motivated assault on higher education.” It called the equation of protesters with terrorists an “incitement to violence,” and described recent events as “an existential threat to democracy.”

These statements of support from faculty are to be welcomed and deserve circulation. They take place as over 2,500 students have been arrested at anti-genocide encampments across the US and in the face of brutal fascist and Zionist assaults on protesting youth. As the WSWS has warned, the United States in the beginning stages of martial law. Imperialist war abroad necessitates war at home.

Students and growing numbers of faculty members have taken a courageous stand. But now that the fight against war and police dictatorship has been raised on the campuses, it must be resolved “in the factories, warehouses, railroads and docks,” as a recent statement by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees declared. Workers have an obligation to defend students and academics through industrial action to force an end to both the police crackdown and the

genocide.

The defense of democratic rights requires a fight against the Democratic Party, the Biden administration and the capitalist system itself. The attacks on students have been perpetrated by Democratic and Republican parties alike, from Biden on down, in almost 30 states.

Wayne State, like many other universities, is run by the Democrats. It is fully part of the financial-military-industrial complex, receiving grant money for military research and propping up the political establishment against the increasingly restive Detroit working class. To this end, The Wayne State Board of Governors is staffed with politicians and ruling-class servants, representing capitalist interests at the highest levels.

The BOG is chaired by Democrat Shirley Stancato, a longtime banking executive at Chase Bank who also has a seat on the board of Fifth Third Bank. For nearly 20 years she was also the chief executive officer of New Detroit, the Ford Motor Co.-funded big business consortium established in the wake of the 1967-68 urban rebellions to co-opt radical opponents and stabilize capitalist control via black Democratic politicians.

The BOG vice-chair is Democrat Bryan C. Barnhill, a Ford Motor Co. executive and previously the Chief Talent Officer of Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan. Barnhill's résumé also includes his time with Kushner Companies of New York, managed by Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared, after his father Charles Kushner went to prison for tax evasion and witness tampering. The company has substantial ties with the Israeli government and has come under suspicion for money laundering.

Other prominent Democrats on the eight-person BOG include Anil Kumar, a doctor who is currently running for Michigan's 10th Congressional District; and Marilyn Kelly, the former chief justice of the Michigan Supreme Court.

Of particular note is Mark Gaffney, the former president of the Michigan AFL-CIO from 1999-2011. During his tenure as the highest union official in the state, southeastern Michigan was ravaged by job losses. Gaffney ensured labor peace on behalf of the automakers and other corporate interests.

This bloodletting cost an estimated 450,000 jobs, 23 percent of the area's total workforce, according to a University of Michigan survey. During Gaffney's tenure, autoworkers were also subjected to a 50 percent payout under the terms of the Obama 2009 bailout of GM and Chrysler.

Indicating his loyalties to the financial elite, Gaffney spent 12 years as a member of the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, serving at both the regional bank in Chicago and the branch bank in Detroit.

Rejecting appeals to the Democratic Party, the BOG or other capitalist politicians, the president of the WSU chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) said:

The IYSSE unequivocally condemns the attacks on the peaceful protests of students, professors, and workers. We support the actions of protesters: no one's tuition should go to fund a genocide. But the goals of these protests do not go far enough.

The police crackdown is a class issue. Behind the Wayne State Board of Governors lies "Genocide Joe" Biden and both Wall Street parties. This is an imperialist war. Washington is involved not for "human rights," as is obvious, but for control of markets, supply chains and trade routes.

The same profit motives driving war abroad are driving dictatorship at home. The Democrats and Republicans making an example of the students will use the same methods against the working class, which is pushing for strike action against poverty and exploitation.

This is why the working class must come to the defense of students. The IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party are fighting

to mobilize workers, including autoworkers, logistics workers and defense workers, to take industrial action to force an end to the crackdown and to the genocide. The workers make the world run, and they are the only ones who can truly stop genocide.

We call on students to join our appeal to the working class. Come with us to the factories and other workplaces and make the case to workers yourselves for why they must join you. The working class are the ones with true power to change what is happening, and they are the only true revolutionary class.

Nole, another leader of the campus IYSSE, added:

In the wake of massive demonstrations and solidarity movements aimed at exercising students' right to freedom of speech, the IYSSE stands in support of the WSU faculty's protest letters. These letters are integral to the mobilization of workers to oppose the state-sponsored suppression tactics. In the end, they are all aimed directly against the working class and will be used by the ruling elites to quell workers' strikes.

The mobilization of the working class on campuses across the United States must also be connected to workers at the factories. As of right now, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees demands that the UAW call for a political strike to take place at auto plants and defense plants.

The IWA-RFC also warns of the unions stalling the efforts to build for a strike, or even trying to end the the demonstrations with toothless "compromises." This is connected to the bureaucracy's support for "Genocide Joe" and the Democrats. On behalf of US capitalism, they work to enforce sellout contracts which have paved the way for mass unemployment.

With Joe Biden endorsing the crackdown, together with the billions of dollars for Israel and Ukraine, shows the lengths the Democrats will go to preserve the interests of capitalism and drive to war. The relationship between this police reaction against freedom of speech and the Democratic Party needs to be understood for what it is. There must be no delay in the demands for strikes aimed at opposing war and ending the suppression of our freedom of speech. We fight for an international socialist perspective, as part of a global effort to oppose capitalist barbarism.



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