

University of Chicago sends police to destroy protest encampment

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On Tuesday, May 7 before sunrise, the University of Chicago ordered its private police force to raid the Gaza solidarity encampment that students had built in the main quad last week. As students were sleeping in their tents, police broke into the encampment, forced all students out of the quad, and began trashing the student's signs, artwork, and other belongings in the encampment.

Similar to other protest encampments at campuses throughout the world, the University of Chicago students are demanding the immediate end to the US-backed genocide in Gaza and that their school cut all ties with the state of Israel. Simultaneously as the raid against the student encampment occurred, Israel began its bombardment of the city of Rafah, the only major city in Gaza still standing and where over one million refugees from other areas in Gaza have been forcibly displaced.

Students at the encampment reported brutal treatment by the University of Chicago Police Department (UCPD). One student posted in a statement on X/Twitter:

They waited until after 3am, when the camp was at its most vulnerable, to send riot cops to violently clear the space and brutalize our black and brown and female students... We were given no clear warning to disperse in the encampment before the raid - that was given hours after... I witnessed my friends being grabbed and pushed to the ground and having metal chairs thrown at them.

The student stated that the raid was, "a cowardly act of repression and violence" but that it would not deter students from continuing to protest against the genocide in Gaza and the Rafah invasion.

In the days leading up to the raid, students from the

encampment met with university administrators to discuss a possible end to the encampment. In a token gesture, the university told students that if they willingly abandoned the protest that the school would create a scholarship program for eight students from Gaza to attend the University of Chicago.

However, the coalition of student groups organizing the encampment, known as UChicago United for Palestine, did not accept the deal and refused to end their protest. In a statement on the discussion with the administrators the group wrote, "We could not accept a deal that would put constraints on our movement while doing nothing to end UChicago's material complicity in Israeli genocide and colonialism."

Shortly after, the university issued a warning to students that if they did not leave the encampment that the police would be sent in to force them out. Students issued a call for support that was answered by hundreds of community members Monday night to come out to the encampment and defend it from attack.

According to statements from students the raid was originally planned to take place just after midnight but was put off until the crowd thinned and students, exhausted from a week of the encampment, took a few hours rest. As early as 5:00 a.m., students and supporters returned to campus to find police with riot shields blockading the entrances to the main quad.

As students rallied at the police line, they were handed leaflets issued by the university threatening that if protests continued, they would be suspended and evicted from campus housing. Police used their shields to push back against the group of students. UCPD officers were photographed with tape covering their badge numbers.

The University of Chicago Police Department is one of the largest private police forces in the world. Its cops are widely hated by the working class in the neighborhoods surrounding the university where they patrol for regularly

profiling and harassing workers. In 2018 UCPD shot and wounded a student experiencing a mental health crisis.

In the immediate aftermath of the campus raid, Democratic Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson attempted to distance himself from the attack. In a statement issued by his office, Johnson stated that the Chicago Police Department “expressed an unwillingness to participate” in the raid but that the university decided to proceed. The short statement concluded by feigning support for “free speech and safety on all of Chicago’s college campuses.”

It is absurd to think that such a police raid could take place in the country’s third largest city without the express approval of the mayor, regardless of which particular police organization was involved. Additionally, the CPD did have a presence on the campus during the raid and was observed by witnesses to be just around the corner from the encampment with “paddy wagon” trucks ready to make mass arrests.

Over the weekend, Johnson ordered the CPD SWAT team to arrest 68 students who staged a protest at the Art Institute of Chicago. Within minutes of the protest beginning, students were swarmed by officers, torn from each other’s arms and dragged off.

Johnson, backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is working in close collaboration with the Biden administration as it plans for the Democratic National Convention to be held in Chicago this August. The city has plans to erect a massive, militarized zone around the site of the convention to keep demonstrations at a distance and police are preparing to crack down on protests.

The raid at the University of Chicago is among the latest in a worldwide crackdown on the free speech and democratic rights of left-wing and anti-war protests. The imperialist powers cannot advance their plans for genocide and world war while students and workers are able to speak out against it freely.



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