

“Strikes and industrial labor action ... can actually make a difference,” student at Cal State Los Angeles Gaza encampment tells WSWS

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According to a tracker maintained by Students 4 Gaza, students at 182 schools have established protest encampments against the genocide in Gaza.

As of this writing, tents have not only sprung up across campuses in the US, but in dozens of countries including Japan, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Mexico, United Kingdom, Turkey, Germany, France, Tunisia, Italy and Austria, among others.

The encampments, led by students and in many cases joined by faculty, have been overwhelmingly peaceful. This has not prevented far-right pro-genocide elements and police forces from violently attacking students and their supporters, often with the blessing of university administrators and government officials.

As this is being written, over 2,600 people have been arrested in the United States for participating in anti-genocide encampments on or near school campuses. Almost all of these arrests have targeted pro-Palestinian supporters.

In the face of police and right-wing violence, as well as personal and professional repercussions, courageous students at the California State University, Los Angeles, established their Gaza solidarity encampment last week on May 1.

Jake, a history student at Cal State and participant in the encampment, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that among the student’s demands are for the university to cut “all investments and cut financial ties to Israel. We want to engage in a full academic boycott of any partnership with institutions, universities and organizations that invest in, support and legitimize the Zionist regime of Israel.”

He added,

We want Cal State LA to call for an end to the occupation. We demand the CSULA president release a statement condemning the occupation, colonization and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people by Israel, including a call for a permanent ceasefire. We also demand amnesty for all protesters, including from future suspensions or expulsions.

As the interview was being conducted, a Republican-led subcommittee in the House of Representatives was concluding the latest bogus “antisemitism” hearing. The hearing, as was the case with previous congressional sessions featuring school administrators, was not called to actually deal with the threat of antisemitism, but to slander anti-genocide protesters in an attempt to stifle the growing anti-war movement.

Asked to comment on the claim that opposition to genocide against the Palestinians is “antisemitic,” Jake replied:

It’s the classic strategy of trying to tie all criticism of Israel to antisemitism, to delegitimize it.

This has always been the goal of Zionist organizations, who want to delegitimize any sort of criticism, including by Jews who criticize Israel. It’s all pretty disgusting, but that’s its own uniquely kind of disgusting form of smearing criticism of Zionism and of Israel. We’re not antisemitic, of course.

I would just like to reiterate that we have a problem with Israel because of its nature as a settler colonial state and because of the genocide that is currently perpetrated. We would have a problem with any genocide going on right now.

Reflecting on the bipartisan campaign to smear anti-genocide protesters, Jake added:

Democrats for a long time have basically had, on both foreign policy and domestic economic policy, essentially identical opinions to Republicans. They have no problem with Israel, and no problem with Zionism, or just imperialism in general. We saw that as far back as the Iraq War. Tons of Democrats voted for the Iraq war and supported it.

Jake explained that there are many other things Cal State LA should be investing in instead of Israel.

Even beyond the fiscal situation of a lot of students, which is, I think—maybe dire is the wrong word, but uniquely precarious for a lot of Cal State LA students. We have a very high working class population in the student body, as well as a very high non-white population in the student body...

The continued funding for Israel and genocide is the focus of a lot of these universities, or at least, a higher priority than their students. At Cal State LA, one of our buildings where classes are held, King Hall, was discovered at the beginning of the semester to have asbestos in it. And since then, it has been discovered it also has mold and lead in it.

So a university certainly should be spending the money on that, on fixing that, rather than on genocide. And the fact that they haven't, really shows that they don't care about their students as much as they should, at least.

Jake said that since the encampment was established last week, "A lot of people" have "come by to support us," including teachers with Faculty for Justice in Palestine.

Asked to comment on the role of the police in

suppressing encampments, including over 2,500 arrests in the last three weeks, Jake observed:

The police exist to maintain the current order, right? In the United States they continue to partner with Israel, the LAPD, and I believe a lot of other police departments around the United States are actually trained by the IDF... So it makes a lot of sense that they are the ones suppressing these protests.

He continued:

It's very exciting to see strikes and industrial labor action. It is something that can actually make a difference aside from voting the political parties.

I believe definitely there needs to be more action. I'm a history student. Over the course of the 20th century, a lot of that radicalism was drained away from the trade unions, in large part due to violent suppression from the government and from capital.

So the labor unions that remain are the ones who are inoffensive to the government, and that means that they are not organizations that can necessarily be trusted in a moment like this when we need to make decisions that are against the dictates of capital and against the interests of the American government.

I do appreciate that rank and file workers in these unions do support Palestine and want action from their unions. But I think similarly to how we feel about Joe Biden's politics, I think that the rank-and-file members need to take things into their own hands in order to force that.



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