

33 people arrested as George Washington University pro-Palestinian encampment is broken up by police

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An encampment of students at George Washington University in Washington D.C., set up to protest the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, was broken up early Wednesday morning by Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers. Thirty-three people were arrested as the encampment was cleared out.

The demonstrators had been camping at University Yard since April 25, one of many protest camps at universities worldwide that had sprung up after New York City police launched an attack on protesting students at Columbia University in April.

The students are demanding that the university divest from corporations involved with the Gaza genocide; make all investments transparent; protect pro-Palestinian speech on campus and drop charges against protesters who had been suspended on April 26 after they had ignored a demand by GWU officials to end the encampment.

MPD Chief Pamela Smith cited “a gradual escalation in the volatility of the protest....[W]orking closely with the GW administration and police, MPD moved to disperse the demonstrators from the GW campus and surrounding streets.” Smith said that police moved in on Wednesday to break up the encampment after repeated warnings to disperse were ignored.

The dispersal came after approximately two hundred protesters staged a demonstration outside the home of GWU president Ellen Granberg on Tuesday night. Protesters had demanded Granberg negotiate over the students’ demands and rescind suspensions handed out to a number of the student activists the previous week.

During the police attack, a group of demonstrators engaged with police near the campus and were arrested. Twenty-nine of those arrests were for “unlawful entry,”

while four were for assaulting a police officer.

A comment posted on social media by an activist states, “DC Mayor Bowser stated... that students and community members ‘assaulted’ police officers earlier this morning after hundreds of cops raided the @dmvsjp Gaza solidarity encampment at 3:30 AM. We have dozens of videos and footage of MPD & GWPD assaulting, punching, shoving, & pepper spraying the students and community members who were supporting the arrested students.”

A post on social media by one of the activist groups highlighting an incident that occurred with police earlier also demonstrates the false character of the police’s claims of assault:

An Arab student attempted to raise the Palestinian flag for the fifth day in a row, GWPD assaulted and injured him by slamming a metal lockbox on his hand. As students attempted to put up the flag again, GWPD pulled out a knife on a group of students and alumni while desperately brutalizing and grabbing at students. They threatened to arrest every single student, and ripped down our flag, tearing it in the process.

GWPD would rather assault and pull out a knife on students than let the Palestinian flag fly...

On Thursday, participants from the encampment held a widely attended rally across from University Yard, denouncing the violent destruction of the camp.

Students declared their determination not to be intimidated and condemned the university administration for condoning police assault on its students.

The crushing of the GWU encampment is part of a nationwide counter-offensive against student protests as the Israeli government prepares to enter and annihilate the remnants of survivors in the city of Rafah. In the three weeks since the police attack on Columbia, the number of arrests at encampments throughout the United States is fast approaching three thousand.

In Charlottesville, Virginia, last Saturday, state police assaulted, pepper-sprayed and arrested protestors at the University of Virginia, with some of the police wielding assault rifles at the protestors. Twenty-five people were arrested for “trespassing.” Protests throughout the region have also been attacked.

The University of Chicago ordered its private police force to destroy the student encampment there in an early-morning raid on Tuesday, while students slept.

Elsewhere in Chicago, overseen by the Democratic Socialists of America-backed mayor Brandon Johnson, the Chicago Police Department’s SWAT team broke up a protest at the Art Institute of Chicago, arresting 68 students within minutes of the protest beginning.

The White House is the primary driver of these campus crackdowns, with President Joe Biden continuing to equate these anti-Zionist protests with antisemitism in remarks made during a Holocaust Remembrance Day address this week at the Capitol. Biden slandered the protests as “antisemitic” and “violent,” claiming that Jewish students on college campuses were “blocked, harassed, and attacked while walking into class.”

On the contrary, many Jewish students have taken part in the anti-genocide protests alongside Muslims, Christians, atheists and students of other religions. The GWU encampment has been no exception. An image on the Washington D.C. chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace shows a widely-attended ceremony, with the caption describing it as an “anti-Zionist Shabbat.”

Contrary to claims that protestors are creating an “intimidating” atmosphere on campus, it is fascist Zionist sympathizers who are inciting violence with police backing. A recorded video on April 28 shows a Zionist tearing pro-Palestine posters off a campus bulletin board while cursing at demonstrators who tried

to intervene. When called a Nazi by the video’s author, she said “I’m a Nazi, I’m a Nazi...I’m a Jewish Nazi.”

A group of House Republicans from the House Oversight Committee had toured the GWU encampment on May 1. They walked with administrators, demanding the removal of the camp, and criticizing Washington D.C.’s Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser and other officials for not sending police to break it up sooner. Representative James Comer (Republican–Kentucky), in a statement, referred to the protestors as “radical, anti-Semitic, and unlawful.”

A House Oversight Committee hearing on the GWU encampment, which was to include Bowser and MPD chief Smith as witnesses, was immediately canceled following the police raid on the protest camp, hours before the hearing was scheduled to take place.

Comer said in a statement Wednesday, “I had a good conversation with Mayor Bowser. I thanked her for finally clearing the trespassers off the GW Campus. It was unfortunate the situation at GW forced the Oversight Committee to act; however it was apparent that the DC police force was not going to do their job.”



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