

“It’s the working class’s turn to stop business as usual and demand change”: Workers speak out against police crackdowns

Our reporters
10 May 2024

Workers, speak out against the genocide and the crackdown on protests! Send us your statement by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Across the United States, workers are speaking out against the Gaza genocide and the police attack on students being conducted by both pro-war parties.

There are growing calls for industrial action to halt the war. On Monday, May 13, 48,000 graduate student workers in California begin voting on strike action over the violent police crackdown at UCLA, where cops also stood by as right-wing Zionists attacked the protest encampment.

Yesterday, socialist autoworker Will Lehman issued a statement calling on industrial workers to support the students. “If they can get away with banning protests against genocide, next they will send riot cops against the picket lines,” he warned.

Lehman added:

The only way to stop the war and defend our rights is by taking matters into our own hands as the working class, who create all of society’s wealth.

That is why I’m calling on my fellow UAW members to demand immediate strike action by the entire 400,000-strong membership.

We must begin fighting for this now. Hold mass meetings at your workplace to discuss actions.

In the face of inevitable opposition from the UAW bureaucracy, organize rank-and-file strike committees to enforce your democratic will.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing below a number of statements from workers from the past few days. To send your statement, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.

Industrial workers

A Dana auto parts worker said:

Wars only serve the rich. The protesters were clean and tidy but also exercising their constitutional rights in an orderly and righteous fashion. Then the government stepped in as usual.

First, we must question the government’s intentions and then

what happened afterwards. I do not think the protesters for the most part left the mess and graffiti! We have seen these falsifications before.

We as workers [have to] stand for our rights as humans, let alone our constitutional rights! But if we band together, we can make an inevitable difference and change!

A railroad worker warned of the role of the union bureaucracy against the protests, stating:

The union bureaucrats will only defend their cushy jobs. They will not defend workers.

In 2022, we were pushing for a national strike. In response to the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee, Tony Cardwell, the president of the BMWED, sent out a letter warning railroad workers that we would be fired and suffer legal action in case of a wildcat strike and that the Teamsters would not back us. This was immediately after selling workers out to the demands of the railroad companies and capitalist state. Today, the UAW is demonstrating their allegiance to the state by assisting police in dispersing worker and student protesters at UCLA.

A General Motors worker from Flint, Michigan pointed to a pro-war pamphlet put out by the United Auto Workers:

The Truck News is a jointly-produced publication by UAW 598 and General Motors that is handed out to workers. This issue is promoting the war, boasting about how we once made military planes and vehicles, influencing workers to be proud of these past contributions, but not explaining that the war kills and has horrible effects on the working class, with no benefit to us.

The UAW is promoting sweatshirts with war planes on them, influencing us to be proud of whatever coming participation in the war we will be [doing], foreshadowing the possible future. [UAW President] Shawn Fain is promoting war, which literally kills working class people, and influencing working class people to support it. It’s absurd.

The working class has to seize production and join in the fight with the students and the rest of the world to stop the bloodbath, genocide and potential nuclear war. With students recently coming together in large numbers protesting on campuses in almost every

city, that is helping us develop collective consciousness, [to] see eye to eye and stand up for what is morally correct.

It's the working class' turn to stop business as usual and demand change. What stops us is the fear of losing our jobs, which we rely on to survive and make money, but the power for change is with us all together standing up at once.

History is repeating itself [like the] Kent State massacre. If the Flint sit-down strike were today, it would be denounced as terrorist because it stopped production. This new principle is terrorist in itself, and we need to take the power back by stopping production and showing who really is in charge.

Educators

Teachers across the country have spoken out in defense of students.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, where particularly brutal crackdowns have taken place at the University of Michigan, public school teachers are fighting against massive budget cuts.

Educators who spoke to the WSWWS connected the fight against austerity and war. One teacher said:

I've taught my whole life, at a great cost, not just financial but personal, because to be an educator and to do it well is to ask a lot of sacrifice from your family. Not supporting teachers hurts everybody, especially the kids. It is really messed up that we are spending money to go and kill people... instead of helping the living.

Asked what he thought about the arrest of more than 2,500 students for protesting the slaughter of the Palestinians, he said:

What they're quietly doing, or maybe not so quietly, is suppressing the most progressive spirit in our country. You saw it in Vietnam. You saw it during the so-called Persian Gulf War. I was part of those protests, and you don't silence those voices. I would love to see workers stand in solidarity with the students.

Another teacher, when asked about the nearly trillion-dollar military budget and the recent \$95 billion bipartisan military funding package, responded:

Why do we even have to hear that? We have money available for war, but we don't have money to put into our schools to help pay for classroom materials, to give our teachers the salaries they deserve.

She concluded by defending the protesting students, saying, "They should not be persecuted... Everyone should be able to speak their mind freely."

At a protest against school cuts this week in **Los Angeles, California**, teachers Cindy and John spoke to the WSWWS. John said:

Are the students going to get financial aid? It's already hard. And we're working for schools that are primarily low-income, Hispanic, and they're first-generation college students. We need our school counselors. So fund our school counselors! Fund all of our students' needs!

Currently, there is such a shortage, Cindy explained:

We have one counselor for 750 students. Anything below that we have to pay for them. So we're paying for an extra one. And we're losing one. Our students need all the resources.

When this reporter asked what they thought of the working class coming to the defense of the students protesting the Israeli genocide, John said, "I personally support a ceasefire. I support life for those who live in Gaza."

A music teacher from eastern Ohio told the WSWWS:

I oppose the assault on Gaza because Gaza and its citizens are guilty of nothing more than being Palestinian. They are not guilty of the Hamas attack on Israel, any more than the people of Israel are guilty of the Israeli government's attack on Gaza.

The pretense of "self-defense" is a sham. You do not bomb and starve children for self-defense.

Democrats, and Biden is no exception, have supported imperialist war and war upon the international working class for generations. Instead of truly being the party of peace and workers, Democrats are capitalist shills who prove their allegiance with every lie that they tell and with every bit of legislation they pass. The Democrats are absolutely not a viable alternative to the Republicans.

The accusations that the protests are "antisemitic," he said, is "ludicrous." He continued:

Biden, Pelosi and all of their ilk have spread this lie. And university presidents, in order to protect their lucrative role in the capitalist bureaucracy, follow suit, spouting the same lies about protesters.

The attacks on protesters are "disgusting," he said.

While upwards of 40,000 Palestinians have been murdered, students on campuses nationwide have been beaten, trampled, and robbed of their constitutional right to free expression. Adding insult to injury, university presidents tout their love of the First Amendment, while, in the same breath, demonizing campus protesters for exercising the rights guaranteed by this amendment.

He concluded:

The international working class is the only body capable of calling and bringing to fruition just such a call [to end the war].

We've seen so-called "peace" treaties in the Middle East before. They were all capitalist lies. The only true peace will come when the workers of the world have seized control of the means of production and overthrown the capitalist nation-state system.

Rank-and-file committees spanning all industries are the legitimate organ of the international working class. These bodies are, therefore, the only legitimate collective through which such a task can be accomplished.

Union bureaucrats, corrupt to their core, won't do it because they serve the interests of capitalism. Democrats, the so-called party of the people, won't do it because they too serve those same capitalist interests. What's left is the people themselves, who collectively, in rank-and-file committees, can exercise their power to end all class-based society.



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