Dutch students and faculty members protest against the genocide in Gaza

Daniel Woreck
15 May 2024

As part of the worldwide movement of workers and students against the genocide in Gaza and police brutality, both students and faculty members of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) staged their fourth demonstration on Monday, May 13. Students were carried signs saying “All Eyes on Rafah” and “No Genocide on Our Dime.”

At the time of this writing, other prominent universities throughout the Netherlands, such as Groningen, Nijmegen, Eindhoven and Maastricht, are occupied and thousands of students are participating in simultaneous protests and setting up anti-genocide encampments.

As the gathering at Roeterseiland campus attracted many thousands of participants, the UvA administration reported trespassing and destruction and thus justified the intervention of the Mobile Unit (ME) of the Dutch riot police in the university building, brutally beating and arresting students.

Previously, on May 6, inside the UvA, demonstrators constructed blockades utilising desks and railings to obstruct access from the canal side. The Dutch police employed a bulldozer to dismantle the blockades and detained 169 people. Following the police crackdown, protesters gathered around UvA on May 8, and were hit with further police violence and the arrest of 36 protesters. On May 9, a subsequent and spontaneous demonstration was coordinated, once more at the Roeterseiland university campus of the University of Amsterdam. Thousands of demonstrators proceeded to march through the city.

Representatives of the Amsterdam Student Encampment have rejected the accusations of the university administration and the government that the protesters of have caused considerable damage, amounting to around one and a half million euros in the past week alone. Video footage circulated by a smear campaign led by state media depict black-clad individuals smashing screens, defacing walls and breaking windows. The Amsterdam Student Encampment insists that it does not know who these individuals are, implicating state provocation and instigation.

Hand in hand with stepped up measures of state repression, the Dutch political establishment has rallied on social media to intimidate the protests. The caretaker prime minister Mark Rutte (VVD) has called the protests “unacceptable disruptions” and stated, “the events at and around the UvA in the last few days clearly cross boundaries. Demonstrating is always allowed. But using violence against the police and causing destruction is never allowed. Stop that!”

Minister of justice and security Ferdinand Grapperhaus (CDA) warned, “there will be no tolerance for violence and destruction in any form. The rule of law must be upheld.”

Party leaders such as Jetten (D66) and Timmermans (GroenLinks-PvdA) also call on demonstrators “to stop destruction and violence.”

Far-right leader Geert Wilders, who yesterday announced a government deal between his Party for Freedom (PVV), Rutte’s People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the New Social Contract (NSC) party and the Farmer Citizen Movement (BBB), denounced the students as “scum” and “antisemitic.”

These statements have been widely used in state media outlets to legitimize the heavy-handed police response and to intimidate the protesters. Furthermore, the unanimous support for the crackdown exposes the right-wing character of the Dutch ruling elite and the police as an instrument of class rule.

As in other parts of Europe and the US, the protesters in Dutch cities are demanding an end to the US and EU-backed genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, an immediate ceasefire and an end to European arms deliveries to Israel. Additionally, the students and staff members of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and Amsterdam University College (AUC) demand that their institutions sever all connections with Israeli corporations, institutions, and private military entities.

The University of Amsterdam, like many other universities in the Netherlands, has been hesitant to openly acknowledge its affiliations with the Israeli military and its arms industry by playing a sizable role in conducting advanced research and development programs for weapons systems used by the
Israeli military.

The World Socialist Web Site conducted the following interviews at Monday’s protest with students and university staff and distributed the statement “Mobilize the working class in defense of protesters against the Gaza genocide!”

Roza, a student at the UvA, highlighted the hypocrisy of the ruling class regarding the NATO proxy war against Russia and the genocide in Gaza:

Even though I am not Palestinian, I went through some discrimination, and just seeing the reactions of the media, the governments and the politicians to the Russian invasion of Ukraine compared to the Israeli genocide, that can be followed literally live—it is shocking to me and shows the hypocrisy of the “western world.”

I think it is important to speak up and not to be silent; being silent means also being complicit. This is not a war; it’s ethnic cleansing; it’s a colonizing project. It needs to end. There’s so much going on in the world, not only in Palestine. There are so many conflicts, and it’s just eye-opening.

Alongside students and staff members, many residents of Amsterdam took part in the protest. One of them was Amanda, who noted:

The world is waking up in a new way now. There is complicity in all of our institutions across the world. It is beautiful to see people out in the streets, seeing what Palestinians have been screaming their entire lives for the world to see. We just need it to happen as fast as possible because children are dying; people are dying every day in Gaza, so the urgency has never been greater. A global movement is growing every day. This is a US-sponsored genocide. The Netherlands is complicit just as many other countries are, like the UK and France. This US and Israel-led genocide with a coalition of forces, including the Netherlands, and that complicity goes into every institution.

J.F. Engelberg from the Department of Media Studies, who also delivered a speech at the protest on behalf of the university staff, insisted that he joined the protest as a Jewish anti-Zionist member of staff at the UvA to cut across the official narrative to portray protesters as antisemites:

I have been deeply inspired by the passion and the moral clarity shown by our students in their call for the university to disclose, boycott, and divest. These urgent calls have been met, however, with repression, intimidation, defamation, and violence, as the university administration (CvB) refuses to negotiate in good faith, spreads lies about its own students, and then recruits the police to violently repress dissent. We will not stand for the erosion of democratic freedoms at the institution in which we teach and learn. Indeed, teaching and learning cannot take place without the democratic freedoms we hold dear.

I stand beside you in the struggle for a liberated Palestine in which all can live freely under conditions of radical equality from the river to the sea.

The attacks on the protests against genocide in the Netherlands and internationally show the continuity between imperialist foreign and domestic policy, attacking core democratic rights and legitimising mass murder. The Dutch ruling class on its part is terrified the student protests could be a catalyst in arousing the Dutch working class.

Students in the Netherlands and worldwide have taken a courageous stand, but none of the issues they have raised can be resolved on the university grounds. Rather their actions anticipate an even more powerful movement in the Dutch and international working class. The working class, the most powerful social force on earth, which creates all wealth through its labor, must leverage that power to force an end to genocide, austerity and war.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact