

Professors come to the defense of New Orleans students protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza

Emma Arceneaux
15 May 2024

The police state crackdown against students protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza has resulted in nearly 3,000 arrests across the United States. Following the violent breakup of the student encampment at Columbia University in New York on April 18, tent encampments have sprung up across the US and internationally, including in Germany, Argentina, Japan, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and other countries.

These have been violently dispersed by coalitions of university, city, state and federal authorities. In the US, the assault has been politically and logistically directed by the Democratic Biden administration.

In New Orleans, a Palestine solidarity encampment led by students from Tulane and Loyola Universities was broken up by a group of state, city and university police in the early morning hours on May 1, about 30 hours after it was set up. Approximately 100 Louisiana State Police armed in riot gear and gas masks surrounded the encampment, located on the lawn in front of Tulane's Gibson Hall on St. Charles Avenue.

Multiple students were injured after being shoved and assaulted with batons. Students report that police fired rubber bullets at the ground near their feet. Fourteen people were arrested, including two Tulane and five Loyola students.

Six protesters were arrested earlier on April 29, when police attacked students as they were initially setting up tents. New Orleans Police mounted on horseback were filmed tearing down tents and ripping umbrellas out of protesters hands.

The student encampment followed the police assault on an off-campus encampment on April 28 at Jackson Square in the French Quarter.

In addition to the legal charges faced by protesters, which include battery, resisting arrest and trespassing, students face significant disciplinary action from the university administrations.

At least seven Tulane students have been suspended due to their participation in the protest, including Silas Gillet, a Jewish sophomore. Gillet reported to Al Jazeera that he was evicted from student housing and that his and other students' scholarships are in jeopardy as a result of their suspensions.

Additionally, the Tulane administration has suspended the campus chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society for its role in organizing the protest, on the bogus grounds that the group violated regulations by holding an "unregistered event" and that they engaged in "antisemitic chanting, disruptive noise, and shoving police."

The lie that opposition to Israel's genocide is "antisemitic," used by politicians, the media and university leaders to justify the suppression of protests, has been repeatedly refuted by the participation of many Jewish students and activists in the protest against Israel.

On Friday, members of Jewish Voice for Peace in New Orleans delivered a letter to the Tulane administration, signed by 250 people, demanding the university reinstate all suspended students, issue a correction on unsubstantiated claims of antisemitism among protesters, and vow to divest from Israel.

The violent crackdown against antiwar opposition, led by the Democratic Party and Biden administration in coordination with the far-right Republican Party, is producing broad opposition throughout the public, including among university faculty, some of whom have themselves been the victim of violent police assaults.

In an important display of solidarity with the democratic rights of their students, faculty from both Tulane and Loyola have issued principled public statements denouncing their respective university administrations.

In a video posted to social media, over a dozen Tulane professors condemned the university administration's response to the peaceful student protest and denied the administration's lie that the protesters were violent and

antisemitic.

The video statement reads as follows:

I am a professor at Tulane University. I was present at the Pro-Palestinian protest on Tulane's campus. I observed Tulane students engaging in peaceful and nonviolent demonstrations. Tulane's administration is currently seeking to punish staff, students and faculty, who attended the encampment or have merely expressed private support for students to administrators. We demand Tulane stop criminalizing peaceful student protests. Lift student and staff suspensions and drop all criminal charges against members of our community.

We condemn the violent and disproportionate use of TUPD, NOPD and Louisiana State Police.

We condemn the administration for placing at least four members of staff on administrative leave and threatening employees with termination for simply attending peaceful protests.

We defend our students' right to free speech and political self-expression and stand in solidarity with them as their professors.

In addition to the video statement, nearly 300 faculty at Tulane have signed an Open Letter to President Fitts denouncing the crackdown on the student protests.

The letter states that faculty hold a "range broad range of views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, we share a commitment to listening to our students' concerns no matter their political views. This encompasses the right to freely express their perspectives on government and university policies." It denounces the arrest and suspension of students and calls for the university to reverse the suspensions and discontinue its "efforts to intimidate students and employees" with threatening retaliation for protesting.

Faculty from Loyola University have also published a letter in the student newspaper, *the Maroon*, urging the administration not to file conduct charges against the arrested students.

They wrote, "[W]e can all come together to use our amplified voices to denounce the excessive force used by police against our unarmed students participating in civil disobedience, a tradition that has played such an important role in this nation's tortured history.

"Furthermore, we cannot sit by silently in light of the administration's singular focus on the legal issue of trespassing as justification for their subsequent direct threats

to weaponize the student code of conduct against our students. Trespassing is not a simple legal concept that we can unilaterally condemn. After all, Loyola often (rightly) celebrates great 'trespassers' in US history as heroes. For example, all of the students who participated in sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement were trespassers on private property."

The statements of support from faculty, who themselves are faced with intimidation and threats of retaliation from the universities, are important and welcome, and their calls for the universities to drop suspensions of students and reinstate the SDS chapter must be taken up broadly. But the interconnected fight against the genocide and the fight to defend democratic rights cannot remain centered on the campuses.

The escalating repression against the student protests must be understood within the context of the expanding global war led by US and NATO imperialism, which includes the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine against Russia, and the military buildup against China.

As Andy Thompson, a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, explained in his speech to the annual May Day rally hosted by the World Socialist Web Site, students must unite with the working class to stop the genocide and world war.

Students and young people cannot stop the genocide or imperialism alone, and through appeals to their campus administrations to divest from the US and Israeli war machines. The fight against imperialist war and the genocide in Gaza can only be advanced through the mobilization of the international working class, the principal revolutionary force in society, which has the power to stop all weapons production and shipments.

The explosion of militarism abroad is incompatible with the right to free speech at home. The aim of this state campaign is to abolish free speech, not only on the campuses but in all areas of social and political life, in the US and internationally.



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