

Students, autoworkers denounce police assault on Gaza encampment at Detroit's Wayne State University

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Detroit police attacked a protest encampment at Wayne State University in the early hours of Thursday morning, detaining 12 people. Five people were released from jail early Thursday evening, while the remaining seven were issued trespassing citations.

The move is the latest in the ongoing and savage crackdown on student protests against the US-backed genocide in Gaza. The encampment was formed on the previous Thursday night and continued despite an order to disperse earlier this week by campus administration.

On Thursday morning, riot cops encircled the demonstration, which included 200 people at its peak, preventing protesters from leaving, then moved in to break it up, according to the *Detroit Free Press*. One student who spoke with the newspaper said that police appeared to be deliberately targeting women in the encampment. Police also used pepper spray against the demonstrators. A video posted to Instagram also showed a cop attacking a leader of the campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine with a baton.

Later that afternoon, at least 100 demonstrators gathered outside of the local jail where the five students were being held.

The *World Socialist Web Site* denounces these arrests and demands the immediate dropping of all charges against demonstrators. This includes not only any legal charges but any and all discipline by the university against either individuals and groups involved in the encampment, such as Students for Justice in Palestine.

The WSWs urges autoworkers throughout Detroit and the wider region to come to the defense of students, both at Wayne State and around the country. Autoworkers should form rank-and-file defense committees, linking up with other sections of the working class to prepare actions against the war and in defense of the right to free speech.

The crackdown will not stop at the students, but also be used to attack autoworkers opposing mass layoffs in the auto industry.

Socialist Equality Party vice presidential candidate Jerry White issued a statement denouncing the attack on the encampment. "This was organized at the highest levels, starting

with the Biden administration, [Michigan] Governor Whitmer, and the Democratic mayor of Detroit, Mike Duggan."

The WSWs spoke with several autoworkers about the attack on student. "They are looking at stopping these protests before they even get started," one Detroit autoworker said. "I think people have the right to speak out. They are US citizens. A lot of it is discrimination.

"The fine print is that there are certain protests they don't want to have ... I have seen many protests over the years that they didn't try to stop. For some reason now they are fearful something is going to happen."

"The US only feeds who they want to feed," he concluded. "They pick and choose based on who they are going to make a profit out of."

The assault took place during an ongoing anti-genocide strike by thousands of academic workers, who are also members of the United Auto Workers, at the University of California system. This is a major development because it poses the need for the working class, using the methods of the class struggle, to emerge as the basic political force against war and dictatorship.

This question is posed even more sharply by the fact that the attack on the right to protest has now spread to a university located in the heart of US auto industry. A commuter school with nearly 24,000 students, Wayne State's student body includes not only many children of autoworkers, but even students with jobs in the factories. The university also has nearly 3,000 Asian students, mostly from the metro area's large Middle Eastern and South Asian communities.

But responsibility for the attack also lies with the UAW bureaucracy. While claiming to support a ceasefire, the bureaucracy supports "Genocide Joe" and even threw out protesters from their own conference earlier this year where Biden personally accepted the UAW's endorsement.

The UAW is deliberately isolating the UC strike to three out of 10 campuses, in defiance of the will of 48,000 academic workers to strike across the entire system. The apparatus has also done nothing to even inform workers in Detroit about the strike. Autoworkers are finding out about the UC strike

primarily through the efforts of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

“A few weeks of university students withholding labor at a few campuses will not be enough to get University of California to disclose and divest,” one engineering graduate student at UC Davis said. “The UAW needs to escalate. More campuses need to strike and more workers need to stand in solidarity. Classes and research don’t represent enough profit to UC to get the administration to yield. Shipments to UC need to stop. Construction needs to stop. All UC campuses should be fully shut down.”

An auto worker at Stellantis’ Detroit Assembly Complex told the WSWS:

They acted as though the students were armed and dangerous. Young people have the right to protest. It’s scary to see the government bully them. They want to frighten people, make them think that if they speak out they will end up in jail or lose their lives.

I’m against these wars and the government putting all this money into them when we need the resources here. These wars are not in our interests. I remember the war in Iraq, where all the politicians pushing for the war had some connections to the oil or the defense industry. It was just plain thievery to get the oil in Iraq.

This is personal for me because my son is in the military. I don’t want him fighting or dying for these corporations. Now, Biden wants Ukraine to fire US weapons into Russia, even though Putin says that means war.

The University of California workers are doing the right thing, and all UAW members should support them. But we haven’t even heard about the strike because the UAW isn’t telling us about it.

I would tell the UC strikers: It is best that that they all walk out together instead of this phony “stand up strike” business. [UAW President Shawn] Fain did that to us last year. Instead of us all going out, only a handful of plants went on strike, and it didn’t change what the companies were offering. The rest of us were kept on the job working 12-hour days and mandatory Saturdays. Beware you are not used as pawns like we were.

A representative of the Wayne State chapter of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party which publishes the WSWS, denounced the attack.

The raid by Wayne County and Detroit police ... on the encampment is an affront to any notion of free speech.

This only shows the steps taken by Biden and university presidents to silence anyone from speaking out against the genocide.

As one of my IYSSE comrades has pointed out, from day one the administration demeaned the encampment as having “legal, health and safety, and operational challenges” towards the community. ... more recently, the administration shifted the school to remote operations because of “public safety concerns.” In reality, there had been no violence until the police raided the encampment...

...These actions by Wayne State are not unique; similar attacks have been taking place at schools throughout the US and the world. Politicians like “Genocide Joe” allow and support this genocide while suppressing opposition. They are not accountable to the democratic will of the people or international law. They will do whatever is in the interest of the billionaires, the capitalists, the people who run everything from weapons manufacturing to universities. That is why the US has continued to support Israel, no matter what.

The genocide cannot be stopped by students alone. The working class must get involved. But action has been stifled by the bureaucracy of unions like the UAW. Working on behalf of Biden, they have limited the walkout at the University of California system to only a few thousand people out of nearly 50,000.

But the overwhelming opposition to the war is only partly revealed by the encampments. The same sentiment exists in the working class all over the world. Workers have the power to stop the genocide completely. They are the ones who ship the supplies, make the weaponry, and who are ultimately sent to fight in the wars. They are the ones who can stop it.



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