

The fraud of the Ontario Federation of Labour's declaration of "solidarity" with anti-genocide protesters

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The University of Toronto administration is seeking to use all available means at its disposal to disperse the ongoing student anti-genocide encampment at the university's College Circle. Late last month, the university issued encampment members with "trespass" notices and filed a court case to seek an injunction to remove the camp.

The university's actions expose the implacable hostility of the administration of Canada's wealthiest university, and the ruling class as a whole, to opposition to imperialist war and genocide. Issued the same day as the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel must stop its onslaught on Rafah, the "trespass" notices express how Canada's ruling elite, from the Trudeau Liberal government on down, will tolerate no exposure of their collusion with the Zionist regime in its "final solution" of the Palestinian question.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), which claims to "represent" over a million workers, responded to the university's threats by issuing a call for a "solidarity rally" May 27, the date that the university gave in an ultimatum for students to vacate the premises. "The OFL is calling on trade unions, students, community members, and allies to join a solidarity rally to defend students' right to protest, and to oppose attempts by the University of Toronto administration to remove the student encampment from campus," the OFL wrote.

The call for the rally was issued by Laura Walton, who was catapulted to the presidency of the OFL after proving her ability to effectively suppress the class struggle in the sellout of the 2022 Ontario education support workers' strike. With some 55,000 strikers defying a strike ban imposed by the hard-right, Doug Ford-led provincial government in November 2022, Walton, as the lead negotiator for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), collaborated with top union bureaucrats from the OFL, Unifor, and Canadian Labour Congress to suppress a burgeoning movement for a province-wide general strike. After calling off the education workers' strike without so much as a vote, she led the ramming through of a wage-cutting contract a few weeks later.

The OFL's encampment solidarity-rally stunt drew approximately 100 people, providing further proof that the union bureaucracy has no intention of seriously mobilizing its membership to oppose Canada's complicity in the genocide and demand an end to the bombardment of Gaza. To date, Israel has officially massacred over 36,000 Palestinians, with thousands more presumed dead under the rubble of Gaza. Tens of thousands more are threatened with imminent starvation due to the deliberate blocking of aid supplies by the Israeli regime. Yet no effort was made to bring contingents of workers to the rally from OFL member unions, including workers in the defence and other industrial sectors forced to manufacture equipment that is shipped by the union-backed Trudeau Liberal government to the murderous Zionist regime. This is because mobilizing and politically wielding the power of the working

class is the last thing the OFL bureaucracy intends to do.

The focus of the union bureaucracy at the rally was to reassert their authority with students with cynical rhetorical appeals. This authority requires reassertion due to the unions' utterly feckless and complicit response to the genocide in Gaza. Over the past seven months there have been many hundreds of demonstrations across Canada against the Israeli onslaught on the Palestinians, yet not one has seen a large union-organized contingent of workers.

Many unions, including OFL affiliates, profess support for the besieged Palestinians of Gaza and call for a ceasefire. But this is all hypocritical hot air meant to pull wool over workers' eyes. The unions and the union-sponsored NDP are the chief props of the very Trudeau Liberal government that on behalf of Canadian imperialism is backing the Israeli genocide and smearing those opposing it as antisemites.

Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) President JP Hornick, who has been lauded as a "militant" union leader by myriad pseudo-left groups, mounted the podium at the May 27 rally to bluster that "If the police come, we will be your human shields. We will be your line of defence." The same Hornick who boasts about the purported readiness of the OPSEU bureaucracy to protect protesting students from violent cops, presided over the cancelling of a meeting last June in opposition to the US-NATO instigated Ukraine war. Without even a whimper of opposition, OPSEU capitulated to violent threats from Ukrainian nationalists and a smear campaign waged by the far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

None of the speakers at the May 27 rally offered a way forward for the student protesters, who are demanding that the University of Toronto (UofT) "divest" its holdings in Israeli companies and acknowledge the genocide being carried out against the Palestinians. Although CUPE and other OFL affiliates represent thousands of workers at the university's three campuses, the most the OFL statement on the rally could muster was a pathetic appeal for the university administration, which has pulled out all the stops to crush the encampment, to "choose negotiations and discussion over ultimatums and repression."

UofT management, and Canada's ruling class as a whole, has already made its choice. UofT has threatened students and academic workers with retaliation, including a "fine of not more than \$10,000" and "disciplinary action under the Code of Student Conduct ... a five-year suspension or a recommendation to Governing Council for expulsion. Faculty members, librarians and staff may be subject to disciplinary measures, up to including termination of employment, in accordance with the relevant university policies and or the applicable collective agreements..."

The University also filed a "notice of motion" in court seeking to authorize police to forcibly evict the students and academics, citing the threat of "irreparable harm" to the institution. The court has scheduled a

hearing for June 19.

The court filing accuses the students of “violence, harmful and discriminatory speech and damage to the University’s property,” while alleging that “Members of the University community and the public have expressed serious concerns to the University about their health, safety, security, wellbeing, and freedom of speech and expression as a result of the Encampment.”

As for the Trudeau government, its trade union backers, and their New Democratic Party allies—they are all accomplices of the genocide. The Liberals approved over \$28 million in weapons deliveries to Israel during the first months of the genocide. The NDP brought a motion before the House of Commons in March ostensibly aimed at recognizing the Palestinians’ right to “self-determination,” only to then collaborate with the Liberal government to rewrite it so extensively that the final adopted version included a full-throated declaration of support for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s bloody onslaught and Israel’s “right” to defend itself. This charade saw references to an arms embargo on Israel gutted from the motion, as well as the removal of a declaration of support for the ICC’s investigation into Israeli war crimes, whose chief prosecutor has since filed an application for arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

Backed by the unions, the NDP has secured the Liberals their parliamentary majority in a “confidence and supply” agreement since March 2022. The arrangement has enabled Trudeau and his warmongering Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland to repeatedly endorse the genocide and escalate the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, which threatens to spiral into a global conflagration fought with nuclear weapons.

Since the beginning of the genocide, the Trudeau government has overseen a campaign to slander and censor opposition to the genocide. A major impetus for this crackdown was provided by the NDP, whose Ontario leadership threw provincial parliament member Sarah Jama out of its parliamentary caucus in October 2023 because she described Israel as an “apartheid state” and declared her solidarity with the Palestinians.

There is nothing to “negotiate” or “discuss” with these political forces, who are up to their necks in the blood of Palestinian men, women and children. What students engaging in entirely legitimate protests on university campuses in Toronto and across the country desperately need is a clear perspective and strategy to take forward their fight against the genocide, including ending the complicity of post-secondary education institutions in it and their role as ideological and logistical auxiliaries of Canadian imperialism and militarism.

The key question is the independent political mobilization of the working class. The working class, which creates all of society’s wealth, has the power to shut down the capitalist economy, including the manufacturing and delivery of weapons to Israel. There is a huge potential for mobilizing the working class against the genocide in Gaza, which has angered millions, and more generally the developing imperialist world war, of which the war in the Middle East is but one front.

Canada has seen a massive wave of strikes over the past two years, including by education support workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, dockworkers, and workers throughout the industrial sector. These strikes have been driven by declining living standards, while stock markets and capitalist profits soar, and an ever-greater portion of society’s wealth is directed to preparing for war.

Under these socially explosive conditions, the very same unions calling on students to “negotiate” with those complicit in Israel’s genocide have done everything possible to prevent worker opposition from developing into a political challenge to the ruling class’ program of austerity and war. They have confined every strike to the pro-employer “collective bargaining” system, thereby serving as the biggest obstacle to the mobilization of the working class’ immense political power.

The union bureaucracy has pursued this anti-worker agenda because it is a privileged upper-middle-class layer with interests different from and hostile to those of the workers they claim to represent. It is these reactionary social interests that are at the root of the union bureaucracy’s support for the Trudeau Liberal government and the NDP-Liberal “supply and confidence agreement.”

The union-NDP-Liberal alliance has worked tirelessly to suppress the class struggle for decades, and shortly after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine was formalized in the form of a governmental compact. The NDP-backed Liberal government is waging imperialist war against Russia, is integrating Canada ever more completely into the US military-strategic offensive against China, and completely supports the Zionist regime’s genocide in Gaza and Washington’s plans to wage war on Iran.

The anti-genocide movement must assimilate this basic reality. If the working class is to be mobilized as a powerful social force, this must take the form of an open rebellion against and political break with the union bureaucracy in the OFL, Canadian Labour Congress, Quebec-based Confederation of National Trade Unions and Unifor.

The potential for a rank-and-file rebellion has been demonstrated recently by academic workers at the University of California. After the police launched a brutal crackdown against a student encampment at UCLA, graduate students and other workers forced the holding of a strike vote on the explicitly political basis of demanding an end to police repression against anti-genocide protesters and divestment from Israeli companies. Faced with an overwhelming vote for strike action, the UAW bureaucracy sought to sabotage the movement by calling out workers at only a handful of campuses. Students at UC Santa Cruz were subsequently attacked by police at the instigation of the Biden government, with which the UAW is working hand in glove in its drive towards a third world imperialist war. Under massive rank-and-file pressure, the UAW bureaucracy was forced to further expand the strike. However, it has imposed an arbitrary time limit on the strike of the end of June, underscoring its determination to prevent the job action from having any real impact.

Participants in the student encampments and their supporters in the working class must draw far-reaching political lessons from this experience. Conditions are ripe for a rank-and-file rebellion against the accomplices in genocide sitting in government and the head offices of all major unions. But this rebellion must find an organized political expression through the construction of rank-and-file committees at every workplace. They must adopt a clear anti-capitalist program calling for a political struggle by the working class against the capitalist system, the root cause of imperialist war and genocide. Rather than following the bureaucracy’s pathetic appeals for “negotiations” with the university administration, students should focus on turning out to the factories, warehouses, depots, offices, and other workplaces to urge workers to support their protest by halting the production and distribution of all goods to Israel that could conceivably be used for the genocide. This is inseparable from a fight to bring the imperialist war machine in Canada, the United States and Europe to a grinding halt, since it is ultimately the imperialist backers of the Zionist regime that make its brutal massacre of the Palestinian people possible.



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