

Anti-genocide student protesters arrested at Australia's Western Sydney University

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Heavily-armed police violently arrested two students at Western Sydney University (WSU) yesterday for participating in a peaceful sit-in against the expanding Israeli massacres in Palestine and Lebanon.

This is an outright assault on basic democratic rights, and the right to protest against the US-backed and armed Israeli genocide, which has the full support of the Albanese Labor government in Australia.

Widely-circulated mobile phone video footage of the arrests shows the police dragging the two students out. One student was thrown against a wall and the other was manhandled to the ground. A female student and a WSU academic who tried to intervene were physically assaulted as well.

This police attack is all the more repressive and provocative because thousands of students at WSU have family members who have been killed, maimed or displaced in Gaza, the West Bank or Lebanon, and many more are concerned about the prospect of a wider US-instigated war across the Middle East against Iran.

The arrested students, aged 24 and 21, were taken to a distant police station at Gladesville and were likely to be charged with assault and/or resisting arrest. Yet it was the police who physically attacked them.

Large numbers of police had been deployed to the Parramatta South campus in the morning, clearly as a result of high-level decisions by the New South Wales (NSW) state Labor government and the university administration. Among them were plainclothes officers disguised as students, some of whom later showed that they were carrying guns.

The protest, called by several pro-Palestine groups at the largely working-class university, was directed against the continuing refusal of the WSU administration, now headed by Vice-Chancellor George Williams, to break its ties to Israel-linked companies

and weapons manufacturers.

Documents obtained via Freedom of Information laws had shown that WSU has investments in weaponised planes, naval weapons and lethal drones.

After a rally and march, about 25 students moved into classroom building EB and sat in the foyer asking to see Williams, whose office is upstairs. They were not blocking anyone using the building, but the police attacked them anyway.

Later the remaining students were threatened with being arrested for “public nuisance” if they did not leave the building, even though they and other students have classes and study areas inside EB.

One of the students involved in the protest described what happened when the police barged into the building to arrest students.

“We weren’t attacking anyone, we weren’t hitting anyone. We just walked into the building really fast,” they told the WSWS.

“Somebody from security—although she wasn’t wearing a uniform—tried to stop people from coming in. But we weren’t pushing anyone. We just put up the banner that we wanted to put up and started making announcements about the investments that the university has with Israel, the terror state, and we kept doing chants.

“First the police chased the person who had the banner. We kept chanting, ‘you’re the ones with the weapons, you’re chasing after someone who has a banner, not a weapon. You’re the ones who have the weapons. You’re the ones who can hurt us. We have not one single weapon on us.’

“We said we would stay here for a couple of hours, have our food, do our study, whatever, and we are going to sit in the corridor. We were just thinking of staying for a while. We did our prayers, for those who

are Muslim.

“Then the police came in twice to arrest one student and the second one. They told us we had to get out, that we were not supposed to be in the building. But we are students of this university and we can be here. We are here all day long normally.

“It’s been a year now and the university still hasn’t severed its ties with the Israeli state. They told us to wait until December but we’re not willing to do that. So that’s why we came here to protest and force the university, in some way, to disclose and divest.

“The university has been sending us emails about our wellbeing, when they are helping kill our families in Palestine, in Lebanon, in Syria, in Yemen.”

Asked why the university had called in the police, she said: “They don’t want us to protest. They don’t want to face demands to divest from the terror state that is Israel. We have been kind of lenient with them this whole year, holding protests outside and not disruptive, but we’ve decided that’s not going to work, because they’re not going to take us seriously.”

The student said the US, Australia, Britain, France, Belgium and other powers were using Israel as a terror state. “They put it into the Middle East to colonise our lands and force us to assimilate into what they want us to be. It’s all about colonising indigenous Arab land, and especially targeting Muslims because they have painted this idea, especially in the West, that Muslims are terrorists and promoting Islamophobia.”

University officials later denied calling the police. Earlier in the day, however, WSU’s campus operations director Anthony Attard had sent an email to all staff members declaring that measures were in place to prevent the rally from affecting a vice-chancellor’s town hall meeting and “regular campus activities.” By that time, police units were visible in various parts of the campus.

Apart from two arrests at the University of Queensland in May, the arrests at WSU are thought to be the first, and the most violent, of students involved in anti-genocide protests on campus.

Encampments at universities around the country earlier in the year were mostly ended by the organisers, in exchange for largely worthless promises by university managements to disclose their Israeli and weapons links.

The WSU arrests are part of an intensified offensive

by the federal and state Labor governments to vilify, threaten and try to shut down protests against the rapidly escalating Israeli onslaught.

Last week, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns and Victorian Labor leader Jacinta Allan each issued statements demanding that protests against the pulverisation of Gaza and Lebanon not proceed on October 6 or 7.

Despite massive police mobilisations, the demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne were joined by about 10,000 people each.

Peaceful protesters are being vilified as antisemitic or terrorists and their democratic rights are being trampled. In other imperialist countries, like the US, Germany, and Canada, peaceful anti-genocide protests on the campuses have been met with brutal police repression and thousands of students violently arrested.

Labor’s backing for Israel’s barbarism is part of its involvement in the broader eruption of imperialist militarism which is spiralling into a global war. That includes active support for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the transformation of Australia into a central base of operations for conflict with China, identified as the chief threat to American hegemony.

The Gaza genocide, the mass killing in Lebanon and the broader war drive of imperialism cannot be stopped by making appeals to universities or the governments responsible for these historic crimes.

To fight genocide, war and attacks on democratic rights, students have to turn to the working class, and take up the fight to mobilise its immense social and political power. Such a turn means a political fight against Labor, imperialist war globally and the capitalist system itself, based on a socialist program.

That powerful perspective was adopted by a general meeting of students at WSU on Tuesday, convened by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



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