

California district attorney files charges against UC Santa Cruz student nearly year after anti-genocide protests

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As part of a broader crackdown on free speech and anti-war protests led by the Trump administration, last Friday the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office announced it was filing charges against a University of California Santa Cruz student who participated in anti-genocide protests on the campus last year.

The student—who remains unidentified due to concerns over their safety—was one of over 100 arrested last May while participating in the Gaza Solidarity encampment. Despite the peaceful character of the encampment, police reacted violently to students, jabbing them with their batons and throwing them on the ground before arresting them.

The same student was arrested again this past October while participating in a campus rally marking the beginning of Israel's genocidal onslaught in Gaza, which was launched using the assault by Hamas on October 7, 2023 as justification.

The trumped up charges filed last Friday concern activities that allegedly took place at both events, including battery of a police officer, resisting arrest and providing false information. No evidence, including video, has been provided by the police or district attorney to corroborate the allegations.

The fact that the charges are only being filed now, nearly a year after the protest took place, underscores their concocted character. After being initially arrested last year, the student, and over 100 others, did not have any charges filed against them. The student now facing charges was able to continue their studies at UCSC.

Witnesses to the October 7, 2024 arrest explained to *Lookout Santa Cruz News* that police approached the student and told them they could not wear a mask or use a bullhorn, and demanded that they identify themselves. According to these witnesses, police proceeded to push the student away from the group of people and then they picked them up and put them into a police car.

The day after this arrest, students held another demonstration against the the US-backed Israeli genocide and the crackdown against protest by the UC system.

Student organizers were again threatened with arrest for using a megaphone, including the student currently facing charges of "battery of a police officer" and "resisting arrest."

The "big lie" being perpetuated by the US ruling class, both political parties and college presidents and the police is that large swathes of young people, students, workers and anti-genocide protesters are actually violent antisemites. In reality, the vast majority of violence occurring at protests against the genocide has come from the police. Last June at University of California Los Angeles, police, in coordination with fascist Zionist thugs, conducted a violent rampage at a Gaza solidarity encampment, assaulting and arresting many peaceful student protesters.

This is all bound up with the broader escalation of a ruling class offensive against the democratic rights of the entire population. In January the Trump administration signed an executive order aimed at restricting free speech at universities, as well as pressuring university administrators to report anti-war students for deportation, with Trump's administration saying in a fact sheet regarding the order, "we will find you, and we will deport you. I will also quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathisers on college campuses."

Last Monday the Department of Education also sent out letters threatening potential "enforcement actions" to 60 universities it deemed were not doing enough to "protect Jewish students," which is code for not doing enough to crush anti-genocide dissent. This was in the wake of the illegal disappearing of Mahmoud Khalil, who is a leader of the anti-genocide protests at Columbia University in New York and was kidnapped for deportation due to his political views, despite being a permanent resident and green card holder and not even being accused of any crime.

Threatening to go after more students who dare express opposition to ethnic cleansing and genocide, Trump posted on his social media accounts, “We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity, and the Trump Administration will not tolerate it... This is the first arrest of many to come. We will find, apprehend, and deport these terrorist sympathizers from our country—never to return again.”

Far from opposing these attacks on fundamental democratic rights, the Democratic Party is directly collaborating with the Trump administration’s major crackdown on the rights of students. The Democrats and the Biden administration paved the way for Trump by criminalizing dissent and arresting over 3,500 students and teachers during the protests last year.

The mass arrests of peaceful protesters was coordinated at the highest levels, with Biden establishing the “National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism” in response to student encampments.

The so-called “left wing” of the political establishment, such as Bernie Sanders, is complicit in these attacks. After stumping for “Genocide Joe” Biden last year, Sanders still refuses to characterize the slaughter in Gaza as a genocide, even as Israel violates the ceasefire agreement and continues to block electricity, food and aid from entering the besieged and devastated enclave.

New York Representative and Democratic Socialists of America member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is likewise complicit in these attacks and the ongoing genocide. Like Sanders, she relentlessly boosted and campaigned for Biden, Netanyahu’s top weapons supplier. In the midst of last summer’s slaughter she provided a platform for high-level Zionists and an Anti-Defamation League operative to spread the lie that antisemitism was on the rise in left-wing and “progressive” spaces.

Rather than fighting to build a movement in the working class that will defend the democratic rights of everyone, the “democratic socialist” Sanders is attempting to steer progressive sentiments and resistance among the youth and working class into pro-imperialist warmongering against Russia.

The University of California Board of Regents, which has been at the forefront of coordinating many of the crackdowns against peaceful protesters, is itself an entity of the Democratic Party and deeply connected to the military industrial complex and other corporate interests. At the beginning of this school year a letter was sent from the president of the UC system, Michael Drake, to all 10

campuses, ordering them to ban all encampments and to crack down on other protest activities.

Last year, UCSC implemented an illegal campus ban on all students who were arrested at the solidarity encampment with no due process, significantly disrupting these students’ education and access to housing, with some even becoming homeless. This provoked legal responses from the victimized students, with a student involved in a lawsuit against the university even having their phone illegally seized by the police days after filing the suit.

Thomas C. Seabaugh, a Los Angeles-based civil rights attorney representing the student who had their phone illegally seized, spoke to *Lookout Santa Cruz News* regarding the latest charges filed against the UCSC student and their ominous timing in the context of escalating attacks under Trump administration. He explained, “It’s hard not to see what’s happening at UCSC, and around the country, as not being part of that, and being tainted by that.” He then posed the question, “Why now? Why a year after the fact over such petty things?”

Seabaugh continued, “I think students and faculty and parents of students want to know, are you going to defend students, or are you going to be accomplices in this crackdown? And for a university like UCSC, which I’m sure prides itself in theory on being a center of tolerance and enlightenment and progressive thought: is this going to be a place of tyranny, or is it going to be a place where the students are free to speak their minds?”

The attack on democratic rights at universities is not isolated to the United States, as shown with the Zionist witch-hunt of Australian academic Randa Abdel-Fattah, which has sparked widespread outrage.

The defense of democratic rights, and the struggle against war and genocide, must be carried out with urgency and a clear political perspective. It is imperative that students take seriously the threats facing them, and make a class conscious decision to turn to the working class, the only social force capable of resolving the crisis of capitalism on a progressive basis.

A politically independent mass movement of rank and file workers and youth against fascism, war and inequality internationally must be built and developed in opposition to all these attacks on democratic rights.



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