

NYPD violently breaks up attempt by students to establish protest encampment at City College of New York

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On the afternoon of Thursday, April 24, scores of New York Police Department (NYPD) officers and security personnel from the City University of New York (CUNY) harassed and attacked students at the City College of New York (CCNY) who attempted to establish a pro-Palestinian “liberated zone” encampment on the school’s campus.

The attempted encampment came exactly one year after the beginning of the five-day “CUNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment” protest at CCNY. Part of a wave of such protest actions against Israel’s genocide in Gaza on university campuses across the United States and internationally in the spring of 2024, the CCNY encampment was brutally torn apart by NYPD riot police and almost 200 students were arrested.

Several dozen pro-Palestinian student protesters announced Thursday that they had established the “Hilmi Al Faqaawi liberated zone” on the quad of CCNY’s campus. Hilmi Al Faqaawi, a journalist for Palestine Today TV, was one of 10 journalists murdered in an Israeli airstrike targeting their press tent at Nasser Hospital in the city Khan Yunis in Gaza earlier this month.

The group of students, apparently affiliated with the New York City Students for Justice in Palestine, wrote on Instagram: “In a time of escalated repression from the state and our universities, escalated resistance is a responsibility, a duty, and a necessity. We follow the lead of Palestine and the resistance, who show us what true bravery and courage means.”

The students issued demands centered around pressuring CUNY to disclose its investments and divest from companies profiting from Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Their demands, focused around the five points, “Divest, Boycott, Solidarity, Demilitarize and a People’s CUNY,” were almost the same as those from the protests last year.

Within 15 minutes of the beginning of the protest action, CUNY Public Safety officers dressed in riot gear and carrying batons were mobilized and began to forcefully move protesters off the quad. CUNY security and NYPD shut down the campus, reportedly searching through students’ bags as they entered the campus.

Police and security reportedly used cars, batons, and

fences—erected after the 2024 protests—to kettle protesters and move them to the edge of the campus. Once there, officers slammed students into barriers, indiscriminately shot off pepper spray and shouted threats of arrest and expulsion at students. At least one student was arrested and many more were injured.

The events at CCNY occurred the day after a report by NBC News that a group of protesters was planning to set up a tent encampment at Columbia University at the end of last week. According to the report, students were planning to erect a tent encampment on Columbia’s main Morningside campus on the upper-west-side of Manhattan and another at the nearby Manhattanville campus.

Fueled by the escalating genocidal onslaught of the Palestinians and Columbia’s collaboration with the Trump administration’s demands for mass repression of political opposition on campuses, an encampment at Columbia would have come a little over a year after the establishment of the mass “Gaza Solidarity Encampment” at the university that sparked the wave of student encampments last year.

Columbia’s administration responded swiftly to the reports of an incoming protest action. The university’s campus was locked down and potential protesters were threatened with arrest. An initial memo sent out by the university’s Public Safety department indicated that it would immediately crack down on any attempt to establish an encampment, including removal of tents, restricting campus access and identifying participants for disciplinary charges and arrest.

As of this writing, no encampment has been attempted at Columbia University. However, the campus has seen a slew of protests and other actions in opposition to the genocide and attacks on basic democratic rights by the Trump administration in collaboration with the university administration.

Last Monday, April 21, around two dozen protesters blocked the 116th Street and Amsterdam Avenue entrance gates of Columbia’s main campus with several protesters chaining themselves to the gates. This was the second such protest this month. Protesters demanded the release of Mahmoud Khalil and Mohsen Mahdawi, both Columbia graduate students kidnapped and threatened with deportation by the Trump

administration for their opposition to Israel's genocide.

In a further sign of the escalating fascist repression of political opposition on campus being carried out by Trump, on Wednesday, April 23, *The Intercept* reported that the Trump administration, through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), had sent out text messages to professors at Barnard College—affiliated with Columbia—as part of its investigation of “antisemitism” on the university campus.

Faculty members received messages asking them to complete a “voluntary survey” that asked if they are “Jewish,” “Israeli,” “have shared Jewish/Israeli ancestry,” or “practice Judaism.” Other questions asked respondents whether they had been subjected to “antisemitism” or were subject to “unwelcome discussions,” graffiti or other signs “depicting antisemitic messages or images,” or “anti-Israeli protests.”

Barnard's vice president and general counsel Serena Longley, according to an email obtained by *The Intercept*, wrote that the EEOC was “legally entitled to obtain the contact information of Barnard's employees.”

Columbia's administration, dominated by the Democratic Party and financial elite, is spearheading the collaboration of major universities with the Trump administration in the institution of a regime of terror on campuses to squash any opposition to imperialist war and dictatorship among students, faculty and staff.

Yesterday, Columbia faculty and staff for a variety of colleges and institutes began a 25-hour marathon speak-out in “Defense of Academic Freedom, Institutional Integrity, and the Research Enterprise” in front of the Earl Gates on 117th street. The speak out, inspired by weekly protests by faculty and students from the Columbia University Irving Medical Center, is demanding that the Board of Trustees fight back against Trump's attacks on the universities, to protect students from ICE, defend academic freedom and DEI programs. The Speak Out is livestreamed on YouTube.

In the aftermath of the attacks on students this week, the NYC SJP released a statement that read, “The [CUNY] campus is a battleground, where student organizers are in constant confrontation with the state.” It concluded, “We are faced with only one solution: to continue to disrupt these institutions until divestment, and the complete dismantlement of the state structures that pressure the university.”

Indeed, students confront the full force of the capitalist state in their opposition to the genocide of Palestinians in the Middle East, which is prepared to stamp out any attempted encampments. It is therefore critically necessary that this opposition be based on an entirely new class orientation and political program.

The Trump administration is working to establish a fascist dictatorship in the US to eviscerate all critical social programs and crackdown on the basic democratic rights of the working population to strangle any opposition to its ability to wage war in the name of American global economic hegemony.

In this aim, Trump has the full collaboration of the Democratic Party. This other party of Wall Street has paved the way for Trump through decades of austerity, attacks on democratic rights and waging of countless wars abroad. The Biden administration backed Israel's genocide and oversaw a vicious crackdown on anti-genocide protesters that Trump is now escalating.

Students and young people must learn from recent protests that challenging fascism, genocide, and imperialist war cannot be achieved by pressuring university administrations, the Democratic Party, or trade union leaders. A mass movement against fascism, genocide and war can only be developed on a new political axis, not through more of the same.

The courage and determination of students must be directed toward the independent political mobilization of the international working class. This is the social force that can carry out the revolutionary social, economic and political change necessary to save humanity from the death grip of the capitalist profit system. The action of Moroccan dock workers in preventing military parts sailing to Israel stand as an object lesson.

Such action requires a serious theoretical and political orientation of students and young people and their education in the history of the class struggle and of the socialist, Trotskyist movement. It is only through the struggle to unify and politically educate and organize workers and young people in opposition to capitalism on the basis of a Trotskyist political program that the genocide in Gaza and the developing fascist dictatorship can be opposed.

All students and youth who agree with this perspective should attend the International Committee of the Fourth International's annual May Day online rally on May 3 and join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality to take up the fight to build a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class against capitalism.



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