

California State University students wage hunger strike against Gaza genocide

Marc Wells
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On May 5, 25 students from San Francisco State, Sacramento State, Long Beach State, and San Jose State universities in California launched a hunger strike under the banner of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), to oppose mass starvation as part of the genocide in Gaza. “We refuse to be complicit in the Israeli occupation’s siege on Gaza, which has left countless Palestinians suffering from malnourishment, disease, and death,” they declared in a statement.

Israel’s siege has turned Gaza into a killing ground. The statement notes, “Starvation as a tool of war and collective punishment has already taken the lives of 17,000 children in Gaza since October 2023.” This figure reveals only a fraction of the monstrous scale of the crime, where children waste away while the world’s leading powers ship weapons, money and diplomatic cover to the Israeli war machine.

The statement warns: “The Israeli government aims to continue the mass extermination of Palestinians by withholding food, water, medicine, fuel, and other supplies at the border, while barring humanitarian workers and medical aid from entering Gaza.” The genocidal siege stretches far beyond direct murder, extending into the everyday life of every Palestinian.

Aurora, a striking student member of SJP at Long Beach State, spoke to the WSWS: “The situation in Gaza is comparable to what the Nazis carried out during World War II against the Jewish people, which was unconscionable.”

She also commented on the role of academic institutions: “Universities have basically become businesses and corporations under capitalism. This drive for profit is partially what has caused universities to become so complicit in global oppression.”

The Trump administration has pressured major universities like Harvard, Columbia, and Penn by

threatening or cutting federal funds if they don’t comply with government demands on cracking down protests against the genocide—which university administrators have dutifully enforced.

Aurora added her concerns about academic institutions’ complicity with the Trump administration: “We’re seeing a lot of anticipatory compliance from our universities, where without even facing any consequences or waiting for Trump to fully do things, they’re already bending to his will just in the anticipation that he could cut them off financially.”

California State University (CSU) responded to the hunger strike by firmly denying any plans to divest from Israel, one of the students’ main demands. In a statement issued through spokesperson Amy Bentley-Smith, the administration said, “We respect the diverse beliefs and personal convictions of our students, including those who have chosen to participate in a hunger strike. At the same time, we strongly urge our students to consider forms of expression that do not jeopardize their health and well-being.”

CSU’s posture of concern for the well-being of its own students stands in stark contrast to the administration’s silence on the suffering of the Palestinians. Tens of thousands of Palestinians, including children, have been killed in Israel’s bombardment and siege since October 2023, with many more injured or facing imminent starvation.

The Trump administration has intensified its backing for Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians while also fueling tensions that threaten to spiral into a regional or even world war. Trump’s close ties with far-right elements in Israel, his promotion of authoritarian measures at home, and his encouragement of campus repression and censorship are all part of a broader effort to crush dissent, stifle anti-war sentiment, and prepare

for escalating conflicts abroad.

Both Democratic and Republican leaders have taken part in criminalizing anti-Zionist protests, weaponizing accusations of antisemitism and even terrorism to justify repression.

Among the demands of the students is the end of the universities' financial ties to military contractors providing Israel with weapons, along with other financial ties. They also demand an end to all restrictions on free speech.

The demand that universities cut financial support for a government carrying out genocide is certainly legitimate, but it cannot stop the genocide itself. The universities, tied by a thousand threads to the state and the Democratic Party, are impervious to the moral appeals of students. More fundamentally, the genocide in Gaza is part of a broader imperialist war—led by the American ruling class and its allies in Europe, with Israel serving as a key proxy—aimed at violently reordering the world.

Despite more than a year of global mass protests, the genocide has not been halted; it has accelerated. It will not be stopped through appeals to the political establishment or the structures of capitalism. Only the development of a powerful, independent movement of the international working class—fighting for socialism—can end war, imperialism, and repression.



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