NYU tribunal hears testimony on police violence and university reprisals against Gaza genocide protesters

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A “Tribunal on Academic Freedom and Campus Repression” at New York University (NYU) on Monday, November 2, heard testimony on police violence and university punishment directed against opponents of the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. Students and faculty described arrests, surveillance and restrictions on access to campus that continued long after police cleared the protest encampments. The hearing documented the consequences of this repression but left unexamined the bipartisan policies behind it.

Organized by NYU’s Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine (FSJP), the hearing took place in a classroom displaying protest signs and a torn piece of tent from the Gaza Solidarity Encampment.

Journalism professor Chenjerai Kumanyika described the peaceful atmosphere of NYU’s first encampment on April 22, 2024, where children, including his daughter, were present. He emphasized students’ distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. That evening, police made mass arrests. Marks from his handcuffs lasted for months.

Samson Tu, a law student and former reporter and photographer for NYU’s *Washington Square News*, showed video of an officer pepper spraying him while he filmed the protest. Tu said the officer received only a 10-day suspension.

A participant in the second encampment, held from April 26 to May 3, 2024, described police deploying a long-range acoustic device (LRAD) at close range at 6 a.m., while most students slept. Many have since reported its sound recurring in their nightmares.

Administrative punishment followed the police assaults. Hamza Mankor, a doctoral and law student, recounted being designated persona non grata following the December 2024 protest at NYU’s Bobst Library. Treated as a ringleader for participating in negotiations, he faced restrictions amounting to a partial suspension.

Campus security repeatedly threatened him at the entrance to the campus mosque. He eventually took a year away from NYU at his own expense and left track and field due to repeated panic attacks. Although his campus access was subsequently restored, he remained barred from the mosque three weeks before the hearing.

“When I think of NYU, I think of an orange barricade,” Mankor said. During a walking tour, student organizers showed participants closed or restricted spaces at Kimmel, Bobst, Gould Plaza and the Paulson Center. Gathering places remain cordoned off long after the encampments were suppressed.

An anonymous student described being targeted after swiping into Bobst near a protest, without ever seeing the purported footage establishing their participation. Their case remained unresolved for 35 days, leaving them fearful of suspension while worrying about family members in Lebanon.

Maha Khan, involved in Students for Justice in Palestine throughout her undergraduate years, described increasingly overt surveillance. Students tried to complete their studies while weighing further protest against the possibility of disciplinary punishment.

Restrictions extended to graduation. Former student journalist Mehr Kotval recounted being told she could not cross the stage wearing a keffiyeh. She chose not to walk, with a security guard stationed beside her, a fitting end, she said, to her experience at NYU.

Logan Rozos, whose diploma was withheld after his May 2025 commencement speech denouncing the genocide, testified over Zoom. He said he never agreed to refrain from changing his speech or addressing politics. He learned of NYU’s response through its public announcement while at a family dinner.

NYU administrators were invited but did not attend. Instead, students read memos from former president Linda Mills denouncing the protests as unconscionable incidents of antisemitism.

Speakers repeatedly contrasted the crackdown with

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NYU's response to protests following the police murder of George Floyd. Those demonstrations expressed widespread anger at police violence and themselves faced extensive police repression. Universities and corporations nevertheless adopted declarations of racial justice, promoting racial identity politics that diverted this anger from the capitalist system and its state institutions.

These official campaigns posed no challenge to US imperialism's war policy. Opposition to the Gaza genocide, by contrast, brought students into conflict with a strategic policy supported by both capitalist parties: Washington's arming and financing of Israel. The racialist politics promoted by the ruling class in 2020 posed no threat to American imperialism's war policy and served as a substitute for class politics. Opposition to the Gaza genocide brought students into direct conflict with the state's strategic interests.

This bipartisan support for the genocide is essential to understanding the crackdown, which began under Biden and intensified under Trump. Yet Trump was barely mentioned during the proceedings, and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani was not mentioned at all.

Speakers described the NYPD's Strategic Response Group without addressing Mamdani's broken promise to disband it or its arrest of anti-genocide protesters on September 24. Nor did they address his subsequent designation of the Zionist Jewish Community Relations Council, longtime organizer of "study tours" of Israel for New York politicians, as the anchor organization for the city's Partners Against the Hate program.

The discussion also gave little attention to repression at nearby Columbia University and City College. Columbia's actions demonstrate that the measures described at NYU form part of a broader assault on academic freedom. In March 2025, Columbia voluntarily banned masks, hired 36 "special officers" with arrest powers and placed its Middle East studies departments under provost oversight to regain $400 million in federal funding. Its July agreement with the Trump administration included expanded cooperation with the NYPD and provision of international student data to the Department of Homeland Security. University administrators were active participants in imposing these measures. The WSWS has compared this process to the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* (Official subordination of intellectual and cultural life to Nazi ideology).

Columbia also suspended nearly 80 students in a single day and facilitated the kidnapping of Palestinian graduate student Mahmoud Khalil. These measures were voluntarily adopted by an administration whose trustees gave 88 percent of their political contributions to Democrats. The tribunal's silence on this record expressed its orientation toward appealing to the administrators implementing the crackdown.

Rozos described NYU as a state within a state that must be dismantled. But its administration's actions express the university's integration into the capitalist state and financial oligarchy. They cannot be explained or defeated within the university's boundaries.

An alternative lies in the struggles of workers and youth internationally. On October 30, dockworkers acted at ports internationally under the slogan "Dockers do not work for war," demonstrating workers' ability to block the operations on which war depends. The day after the tribunal, anger over living costs, war, inequality and attacks on democratic rights found expression in the midterm repudiation of Trump's policies, foreshadowing an explosive growth of the class struggle.

The courage of students and faculty who opposed the genocide must be matched by a political strategy that addresses these relationships. A struggle confined to the university cannot defeat a campaign sustained by the police, the federal government and both capitalist parties. Students must turn to the working class, whose social power provides the basis for a fight against the institutions enforcing the crackdown.

The demand to reverse all disciplinary actions against protesters must be taken up through an independent political movement of the working class, linking the defense of democratic rights to the struggle against war. Building International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) clubs on campuses is a necessary step in preparing its political leadership. Against appeals to university administrations and Democratic politicians, the IYSSE fights to unite students with the international working class on a socialist program against war and capitalism.



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