

Wayne State University officials in Detroit order students to shut down anti-genocide encampment

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Officials from Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit, Michigan, have ordered students to take down their encampment against the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The move is part of the national crackdown being spearheaded by the Biden administration on campus protests that has seen the arrest of more than 3,000 students.

Student leaders rejected the university's ultimatum and urged community members to defend protesters against a police raid and mass arrests, which, they say, could come during the early morning hours Tuesday.

As of this writing, more than 200 people have gathered at the encampment. The decision to send in the police is no doubt being discussed by leading Democrats, including Mayor Mike Duggan and Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Last Tuesday, police used pepper spray in an early morning raid at the encampment at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, arresting four students and hospitalizing another two.

Wayne State student organizations, including from Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), set up the encampment last Friday. Their demands include that the WSU Board of Governors divest from all military and corporate entities that profit off the genocide; end the training of university police by the Israel Defense Forces; and guarantee the protection of students' free speech rights.

On Monday afternoon at 3:00 p.m., Patrick O. Lindsey, the vice president of Community Affairs in the Department of University Relations at Wayne State, ordered the students to disband the encampment by

6:30 p.m. He said student representatives could meet with the university president on Tuesday to discuss their demands but only if the encampment was abandoned.

Earlier in the day, Democratic Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib came to the encampment and appealed to university officials to negotiate with the students. In her comments to protesters, she said nothing about her fellow Democrats coordinating the nationwide attack on campus protests.

In a statement outside the camp on Monday evening, Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US vice president, Jerry White, urged workers to mobilize their industrial and political strength to defend the democratic rights of students and to oppose US imperialism's wars.

Pointing to the strike by University of California academic workers to defend protesting students against mass arrests, he said:

This has been a struggle initiated by the rank-and-file workers themselves, not the UAW apparatus, which has endorsed the reelection of Biden. I urge autoworkers, teachers and logistics workers to mobilize your strength against the attack on the democratic rights of these students and to defend their right to free speech and their right to oppose these wars.

All workers have a stake in this. It will be workers and their sons and daughters dragged into these wars, not only the horrific war in Gaza, but even bigger wars against Russia and China. It will be workers who are forced to pay

for these wars. So, we urge workers to take a stand, defend the democratic rights of these students and take up the struggle against war.

Students, along with workers at the encampment who support them, spoke with the WSWS about their struggle.

One WSU student explained to the WSWS on Sunday, “The police tried to intimidate not only us yesterday, but also the people donating to the encampment. The police followed the people sending food and water and even questioning them to try to get people to stop donating. They told us that we could not put pallets on the grass to support the water bottles and surrounded the encampment and sped off and even called the fire marshal.”

Students said they had complied with any requests by the fire marshal to remove any hazards and rejected the claims by WSU officials that the encampment threatened public safety.

One University of Michigan student from Kashmir described the police assault last week. “I was pepper sprayed and pushed over even as I threw up. I am older and have asthma, so I was sent to the hospital. They were terrible to us. They started watching us with the drones and then the police moved in. They said they gave us 10 minutes. They didn’t even give us that.”

A nurse who spoke to the WSWS denounced the US-backed war crime in Gaza.

“They want us to accept death as normal,” she said, comparing the Israeli genocide with the criminal response of the ruling class to the mass death from the ongoing pandemic. “People are still dying from COVID, and we are still spreading COVID in healthcare settings, even with the PPE. They want the normalization of death not just from war but also from COVID.”

A WSU professor expressed his solidarity with the political strike of the University of California academic workers to defend their students from the police crackdown. She said 100 faculty members had signed a petition condemning the WSU administration’s response to an earlier protest, when police violently attacked students at a Board of Regents meeting. “More teachers and professors should join the fight against genocide. I sent the letter out to as many professors as I

thought would sign it,” she said.

A retired water and sewage worker supporting the students also spoke to the WSWS. When asked if he supported workers taking collective action like the UC academic workers to oppose police repression, he said, “They are a part of the UAW and that means all autoworkers should be on strike. [UAW President] Shawn Fain won’t do it. He is on the other side. He wants them to be ‘the arsenal for democracy.’ You know what that means? Young people being exploited to fight the wars—for the capitalists.”

A retired social worker in Detroit added, “The students’ voices are not being heard, and that’s just not fair. How the universities dealt with the situation is not acceptable. They [the UC workers on strike] are our heroes to do that, to put their livelihood on the line to do what’s right. Maybe we need to follow suit on that. It just seems like everyone’s afraid, but we are not going to support our government, which is sending tax dollars over to kill people.”

When asked about workers taking collective action to stop the wars and police repression, a public school teacher at the protest said, “We wish that would happen. We wish all teachers and workers would go out on strike, absolutely, and shut down the economy! That would really help the people in Gaza, Palestine and Israel. And it would help people here across North America. That’d be great for the environment and for social justice too. What happened at University of Michigan, that’s a fascist action. They’re trying to crush the spirit of our youth, our next generation that’s going to take care of the planet.”



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