

University of Michigan protesters charged with assaulting cops

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On May 16, six months after a sit-in by students at the University of Michigan protesting Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office announced charges of "resisting/obstructing/assaulting a law-enforcement officer" against four of the participants. The charges are felonies, punishable by two years in jail and a fine of up to \$2,000.

The names of the accused have not been released, but in language similar to recent statements by Biden and fascist Republican politicians, a press release from the prosecutor's office alleged that the behavior of the four "crosses every conceivable line that might be drawn."

The circumstances of the police attack on the November protest make clear the arbitrary and vindictive character of the charges. On Friday, November 17, students at UM marched to the office of university President Santo Ono to demand that he discuss the university divesting from Israel.

The administration called in police from the university's Division of Public Safety and Security, the Ann Arbor Police Department and seven other local departments. One report said there were 56 police cars outside Ruthven, the administration building housing Ono's office. Students trying to enter the building were "kicked," "grabbed by the shoulders" and "shoved out of the way" when they tried to object.

Initially, 40 students were arrested and cited for trespass. Charges are currently not being pursued against 36 of the students, but the police are continuing to examine video and say they may announce more charges in the future.

Five days after the announcement of the assault charges, on Tuesday, May 21, at 5:30 a.m., police in riot gear and armed with batons and pepper spray tore down a protest encampment set up on the campus on April 22. In the course of the police attack two students were hospitalized

and four were arrested.

Michael Mueller, a UM graduate student, told the *Detroit News* the university's actions were "terrible." He said:

Unfortunately, they were not unexpected, given the university's response to the divestment movement. But it's unconscionable that the university would react this way to a nonviolent protest trying to stop the university from funding a genocide.

The stepped-up police repression, ordered by the UM administration in coordination with the White House, Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer and local Democratic officials, coincided with the announcement of a strike by student workers at the University of California in defense of student protesters who had come under attack by police and right-wing Zionists.

The prosecutor bringing the felony charges against the students at UM, Eli Savit, a lecturer at the university's School of Law and a member of the Lecturers' Employee Organization (LEO), is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Michigan Democratic Party.

The goal of the repression is to bring to an end not only the demonstrations against Israel's murderous actions and Washington's financing and equipping of it, but of the right to demonstrate against any government policy at all.

This was made clear in a letter from President Ono to university students, faculty and staff immediately after the attack on the encampment. Ono claimed the police assault was ordered because of a fire danger. This is a transparent subterfuge. Several protesters told *Michigan Public* "there were never any open flames" and that students had asked to meet with the fire marshal to discuss any concerns. The

raid, in fact, was of a piece with almost 70 similar police operations so far throughout the country.

Ono's letter also claimed—falsely—that the administration had a “history” of “honoring” “freedom of speech, the right to assemble, and the right to protest peacefully,” and then gave the standard “disruption” pretext for doing precisely the opposite, i.e., that “the university can and must regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure one group's right to protest does not infringe on the rights of others, endanger our community or disrupt the operations of the university.”

Ono then denounced “what can only be described as an assault on law enforcement officers” during a demonstration May 3 at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. Video of the event shows a cop repeatedly pushing one of the demonstrators against a plate glass window.

In Michigan, a key battleground state in the upcoming presidential election, over 100,000 voted “uncommitted” in the state Democratic primary in February in protest at Biden's “ironclad” support for the genocidal policies of the Netanyahu government.

A crisis has also developed in the auto and logistics industries in Michigan and other states. An avalanche of auto job cuts has followed contracts hailed as “historic” by the trade union bureaucracy, its supporters in the pseudo-left and Biden himself.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has not only backed United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain, promoting him fraudulently as a militant, but DSA members have been brought into the upper ranks of the UAW bureaucracy in an effort to prevent a rank-and-file rebellion, promote the Democratic Party in the 2024 elections and support the Biden administration's war-mongering foreign policy. Examples are Communications Director Jonah Furman, strategist Chris Brooks and Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla.

On the UM campus, three weeks ago the LEO prevented industrial action in the face of an overwhelming strike authorization vote of the membership following the expiration of their contract with the university. This resulted in a betrayal, not only of the economic interests of the lecturers, but also of the democratic rights of the protesting students, with whom the lecturers had made a point of fraternizing. A strike by lecturers to secure a living wage and at the same time to defend the student protesters would have received powerful support not only on the UM campus, but nationally and, indeed,

internationally.

The LEO is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), whose president, Randi Weingarten, a member of the Democratic National Committee, is a prominent voice in the bipartisan slandering of student protesters as “antisemitic,” opening them up for attack by police and right-wing Zionist forces.

The announcement by the LEO officials that they had succeeded in pushing through their deal with the administration came on Friday, May 10. Less than a week later the prosecutor's office moved ahead with the new charges against the protesters. Five days after that, the university called in the police to take down the encampment.

This year's sellout of the lecturers followed the betrayal last year of a months-long strike by graduate student workers at UM, members of the AFT-affiliated Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), in which the DSA is prominent. The GEO leadership has made no move to call out its members in support of the lecturers or the embattled students.

In the city of Ann Arbor, the school board announced this week the elimination of 141 staffing positions. The response of the teachers' union was to sign a severance agreement with the board for teachers with more than 10 years' seniority.

The attack on public school jobs in Ann Arbor is part of the tsunami of job cuts currently rolling through the public school system nationally. Funds are being diverted from social programs to finance the expansion of the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, arm Israel in its genocidal war in Gaza, target Iran for military attack and prepare for war against China. Biden recently signed a record military budget of more than \$825 billion.

In the face of all these attacks, the protests continue. Two days after the police raid at UM, students at Wayne State University in Detroit established their own encampment.



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