

“They were jabbing us with their batons”: Arrested UC Santa Cruz student describes police rampage

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On Tuesday, June 4, at 7 p.m. Eastern/4 p.m. Pacific, the WSWWS and International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are holding an online public meeting, “From Wayne State to University of California—industrial workers must oppose protest crackdowns.” Register for the meeting [here](#).

In the early morning hours on Friday, May 31, the University of California administration unleashed a massive police raid on a peaceful protest encampment at UC Santa Cruz, mobilizing heavily equipped officers from agencies across the state.

The campus targeted by the raid is significant because UC Santa Cruz academic workers were the first to walk off the job as part of the ongoing political strike movement against the Gaza genocide and against the assault on democratic rights on UC campuses.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with one of the victimized students over the weekend, who was rendered homeless after the university banned the arrested students from campus. Because the student faces criminal charges as well as retaliation from the university, his name is not disclosed.

As of Sunday night, there have been approximately 80 reported arrests in Friday’s raid. The student personally saw “three vans full and then two buses” loaded with students in zip-ties on Friday morning. Campus shuttle buses were used to transport the arrested students, signaling that the police operation was coordinated in advance with the university administration.

The student described joining the protest encampment after the crackdown at Columbia University in April, although he had been aware of the situation confronting Palestinians in the occupied territories since middle school.

“I had a friend at Columbia who was telling me about what was happening,” he said. “But after seeing what happened at UCLA and what happened to my friends at UCLA who were also there, it really motivated me to do my own part here at UCSC. I also have friends at UCI and Cal State LA.”

The University of California, Los Angeles, where academic workers are also on strike, was the site of an attack by Zionist thugs, a police assault, and anti-democratic retaliation from the

university administration.

The student who spoke with the WSWWS was not involved in organizing the encampment itself, but decided to join when he heard about it. “They already had a lot of tents by the time I got there on the first day,” he said.

He described the encampment as wholly peaceful. Lectures and discussions by faculty and grad students on the history of the region were regularly organized, and dozens of students frequently stayed at the encampment overnight.

Before the May 31 raid, the police had been a constant, menacing presence, but had not attempted to assault the encampment outright. “They set up makeshift cameras and there was always a police car around,” the student said. “Their presence was always felt from the first day. But [Friday] was the first time they actually started coming in and arresting people.”

Last Thursday night, the student was not at the encampment, but learned through encrypted messages from other students that a major police mobilization had begun.

“They sent out a message saying that there was a 16-car caravan [of police cars] coming up to campus,” the student said. “That’s when I got ready and showed up. By the time I got there, they were already there.”

When he first saw the messages, he said, “I felt it was the moment we had been preparing for, that it was finally there. I wanted to show up and do my part. It felt wrong not to join the people I knew, and to not stand up like my friends did. I just wanted to stand in solidarity with all the campuses and my comrades at my school.”

“I knew there was a really big chance of me getting arrested,” he continued, “I thought that was the only way it was going to end as soon as I got there.”

The arrests began in the early hours of the next morning. The students formed a line and linked arms but did not fight the police. The police began singling out the physically smallest students in the line for their attack, jabbing them with their batons and trying to pry their arms from each other. The students held on to each other as best they could, despite injuries that left bruises.

“They twisted people’s arms,” the student said. “They were mostly picking on women that were smaller in stature. They were picking them off the line first. One of the police officers kept jabbing a female student in the chest, even after they were asked to stop.”

The student told the WSWS that later that day, after he had been released. “I was just replaying what happened in my head and after the adrenaline wore off, I got emotional about it.”

“I thought it was, for lack of a better word, insane, because none of us were hitting back,” he said. “They were jabbing us with their batons. It was scary. But I think it was mostly adrenaline keeping me from feeling that way when it first happened. When they pulled me off the line, I just thought—well, I got arrested, I just have to wait it out and see what’s going to happen next—but the outrage didn’t happen until much later.

“At that time, they were still just picking people off the line. It was happening around me, not in front of me. It seemed like they were just catching the weakest links, or maybe people who didn’t have a good link next to their partner.”

“But when the sun rose, maybe around 5 a.m., they started going with their batons at anyone they could get their hands on,” the student said. “They put their batons between my arm and someone else’s arm and tried to pry us off. They were pulling and pushing and grabbing my head and pushing it down. Maybe at least five times they jabbed me with the baton.”

The police assault was a large, coordinated operation, drawing in officers from California Highway Patrol, Scotts Valley, Salinas, Watsonville, San Francisco, and as far away as Eureka, a drive of five or six hours to the north.

After the mass arrests, the students were placed in painful zip-ties, which can leave lasting injuries.

“They put all of us in zip-ties,” the student reported. “I got arrested at around 7 a.m. and I had them on until I got released at around 10:30. I told them that it was getting really tight and that I wanted double zip-ties, but they never did. Some students said that they got some minor cuts. It was really tough because any type of fidgeting made the zip-ties tighter.”

Students tried to identify the officers and their agencies in order to make complaints, but “when we asked for badge numbers, they wouldn’t give them.” At least one officer had his badge number covered up by a piece of tape.

The student told the WSWS that at least one student had to be taken to the emergency room with injuries inflicted by the police, while another person reportedly suffocated and lost consciousness after the police put a plastic bag over his head.

After being violently arrested, the students were given a notice to appear in court to face criminal charges for “misdemeanor failure to disperse.”

To add insult to injury, the arrested student was also told that in addition to the criminal charges, the university was banning the arrested students from campus for two weeks (although the

formal paperwork he was given said one week, not two). The ban was issued unilaterally by the administration, without anything resembling due process, even though the students legally remain innocent until proven guilty in their criminal cases.

The ban is premised on the students supposedly posing a threat of violence if allowed back on campus. However, the student encampment was peaceful, and all of the violence came from the massive police assault that was orchestrated by the administration.

As a result of the campus ban, the arrested students can be arrested again for “trespassing” if they try to return to their residences on campus or to attend class. “Everyone who’s barred from campus that lives there is technically homeless now,” the student said.

The student described how he and his classmates have been subjected to an attack on their democratic rights that will shape their thinking for the rest of their lives. In particular, the student agreed that the Democratic Party is responsible for the crackdown.

While the Biden administration prosecutes the genocide in Gaza, the Democratic Party controls the California state government as well as county and city governments throughout the state. In addition, the Democratic Party specifically controls the University of California system, which is prosecuting the ongoing campaign of vindictive retaliation against the students, including the campus ban that rendered students homeless.

The police crackdown has already led to the arrests of more than 3,000 students at campuses across the US. These police state measures and the US-backed war crimes in Gaza cannot be halted by students alone or through struggles limited to the campuses. The working class must intervene and do so with its own methods of class struggle.

To fight for this, UC strikers need to establish rank-and-file committees which counterpose the will of workers to the UAW bureaucracy, which is aligned with the Biden administration, and doing everything it can do isolate and wear down the UC strikers. These committees must fight for the shut-down of the entire UC system and establish lines of communication with UAW members in the auto, defense and other industries to prepare common action to defend democratic rights and halt the production and shipment of weapons to Israel, Ukraine and other US client states.

“After seeing how they treated us,” the student said, “there’s no way I’m the same after that experience.”



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