

California Democratic Party and university administrations institute “zero tolerance” policies for university protests

Dan Conway
22 August 2024

In a series of chilling attacks against free speech rights, the California Democratic Party, in collusion with compliant university administrations, big business and the Biden administration, has moved to effectively outlaw mass student protests against not only the Palestinian genocide but mass student protests in general.

The state’s two public university systems, the California State University system and the University of California (UC) system, the first of which is the largest in the country, have both issued harsh restrictions on where and how students are allowed to protest in the coming academic year.

Immediately preceding the university announcements was a press release from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), which represents university alumni and donors, i.e., very deeply pocketed representatives of the ruling elite seeking to maintain the institutions of higher education as intellectual bulwarks for the defense of American imperialism.

The release which advocates for the new repressive measures read, in part, “Once an encampment has occupied the campus, the institution has very few options to avoid an ugly spectacle that at best will make the administration look ineffectual and even make the board appear derelict.” The statement continued, “Negotiating and making concessions are invitations to more and increasing demands. They embolden others to employ similar coercive tactics in the future and further undermine the university’s mission.”

Cal State, which has 23 campuses statewide enrolling 457,992 students, issued a bundle of restrictions last week banning tent encampments and all overnight demonstrations. Erecting unauthorized barricades, fencing and furniture is also prohibited under the new policy. In a written statement released to *EdSource*, CSU

spokesperson Hazel Kelly promised that “campus presidents and their designated officials will enforce this prohibition and take appropriate steps to stop encampments, including giving clear notice to those in violation that they must discontinue their encampment activities immediately.”

The new Cal State rules apply to all 23 campuses and supersede any individual campus free speech rules already in place. However, each campus is allowed to institute its own policies that go above and beyond the systemwide mandates.

For example, Cal State Dominguez Hills already released its own addenda outlawing any handheld signs attached to sticks or poles. Additionally, signs are not allowed “to be taped to any campus buildings, directory signs, fences, railings or exterior light poles.”

On Monday, UC President Michael Drake directed administrators at the 10 campus system to put in place measures effectively banning any spontaneous protests on campuses, especially those addressing the nearly year-long genocide of the Palestinian population in Gaza by Israel, supported by the United States.

Specifically, Drake directed the chancellors to stop protests that “block pathways” and to outlaw the wearing of masks on campus, not only barring the right of protesters to remain anonymous but also putting the health of students at severe risk in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed dangers of an emergence of H1N1 bird flu or mpox. The UC president claimed this was necessary to maintain the “consistent application of policies and laws key to achieving the delicate but essential balance between free speech rights and the need to protect the safety of our community and maintain critical University operations.”

The UC system itself is facing a \$25 million loss in state

funding should it fail to crack down on student protests. The funding will only be released if the chancellor provides a “systemwide framework” for imposing the draconian new rules by October 1.

This includes notifications to all students about “free speech” activities on campus prior to the start of the fall term. Students are to be notified of university codes of conduct, nondiscrimination policies, campus processes to resolve violations and potential consequences.

Of particular concern for the state Democratic Party and for the Biden administration at the national level was the encampment at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), which became one of the national epicenters of the student anti-genocide movement.

This was particularly the case after an organized group of Zionist thugs and provocateurs assembled on campus to viciously assault the student protesters there. Many of the students suffered severe injuries with the provocateurs also mirroring the actions of the Israel Defense Force by attacking journalists at the encampment.

The students were assaulted for three consecutive hours with metal pipes, fireworks and pepper spray along with the previous deployment of loudspeakers and bright lights to prevent them from sleeping at the encampment. Police and security forces present during the melee did nothing to stop the attackers and, months later, have made no arrests of the counter-protesters despite many of their identities being revealed by independent media outlets.

The university, at the behest of the Los Angeles mayor—Democrat and Kamala Harris ally Karen Bass—responded by ordering police to attack, not the provocateurs, but the student protesters still reeling from the Zionist assault.

Last week, an obscene ruling by a federal judge declared that the anti-genocide protests were antisemitic. US District Judge Mark Scarsi ruled that three Jewish students experienced discrimination on campus during the course of the demonstrations. “In the year 2024,” he wrote, “in the United States of America, in the State of California, in the City of Los Angeles, Jewish students were excluded from portions of campus because they refused to denounce their faith.”

Scarsi’s ruling orders the university to instruct university police, security and student affairs organizations that they are not to “aid or participate in any obstruction of access for Jewish students to ordinarily available programs, activities, and campus areas.”

The ruling makes clear that this is not a question of excluding students from classes, housing and other

essential services but also “campus areas,” which according to the ruling were cordoned off by bike racks and other obstacles when it became clear that student protesters were facing assaults from the Zionist counter-protesters. The ruling, in fact, is also based on a completely false premise, as many of the protesters in the encampments were Jewish themselves. This was demonstrated by the large contingent of protesters from Jewish Voices for Peace and other Jewish groups.

In the face of a combined onslaught, not only by the university administration but also from the bourgeois courts and the governments at the local, state and federal level, student protesters must turn to the working class to defend their right to oppose the US war machine.

The turn to the working class does not mean a turn to the unions, which do not represent the workers, but rather serve as a police agency for management. At the UC system itself, the unions have worked to isolate and sabotage struggles.

Only two months ago, the United Auto Workers (UAW) called off its phony “stand-up strike” at the UC system, in which only a fraction of workers at UC campuses were called onto the picket line. Almost as soon as it began, the strike was ignominiously called off by the UAW after a court injunction.

Students and rank-and-file workers at the universities and beyond must take the struggle against genocide and war into their own hands. There will be no respite under either a Trump or a Harris administration. The two are equally committed to the perpetuation of mass slaughter in the Middle East and beyond, as the US ruling elite accelerates a drive towards a third world war fought with nuclear weapons.

The alternative is to form rank-and-file committees mobilizing the collective power of the working class and student youth to permanently end the drive to war and fascism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact