

Tulane University in New Orleans upholds suspension of anti-genocide protesters

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Two students at Tulane University in New Orleans have been suspended on trumped-up charges related to an anti-genocide encampment last spring.

According to a statement published on August 28 by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) chapter at Tulane University, the university administration has suspended seniors Maya Sanchez and Rory Macdonald for what the university vindictively claims was “their encampment.”

The protest at Tulane, part of a wave of encampments that were erected during the spring semester around the country and around the world to protest the Zionist regime’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, was shut down in the early morning hours on May 2 after being raided by a coalition of university, city and state police.

Fourteen people were initially arrested, with two requiring hospitalization. Suspension charges were levied against seven students, and the SDS Tulane chapter was deregistered by the administration.

Throughout the summer, SDS members engaged in talks with the administration to reverse the charges of suspension, but, according to the SDS, they were informed by the university Provost Robin Forman that “these meetings will not continue,” despite an earlier admission by Dean of Students Erica Woodley that the university “overcharged.”

The disciplinary actions against the students are entirely fraudulent and are part of the broader crackdown on democratic rights and antiwar opposition across the US and internationally. At Tulane, the suspensions and disciplinary actions against student protesters must be immediately revoked, and the SDS chapter re-registered by the university.

At the start of the new school year, school administrations around the US, working closely with the state apparatus and especially the Democratic Party,

are ramping up their assaults on the freedom of speech and assembly.

In New York City, Columbia University has banned encampments and is restricting campus access, while New York University has changed its discrimination and harassment policy to ban criticism of Zionism. The University of Michigan, having effectively banned all protests last semester, is now seeking to abolish students’ rights to due process and fair hearings.

The escalation of the attacks on democratic rights is in anticipation of a renewed struggle against the genocide in Gaza and against the broader escalation of war throughout the world. Next month will mark a full year since the start of the genocide, one of the most horrific crimes by imperialism and its proxy forces in the 21st century. At the same time, the US and its NATO allies are recklessly escalating the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, threatening a nuclear catastrophe.

From the outset, school administrations, under the direction of the financial-corporate interests and the military-state apparatus which control academia, have waged an authoritarian, violent offensive against the anti-genocide protest movement, which has been the largest and most sustained since the 2003 demonstrations against the US invasion of Iraq.

Following the first anti-genocide protest at Tulane last October, which brought together Tulane students and those from neighboring Loyola University, both students and community members in New Orleans were slapped with trumped-up criminal charges after a Zionist counter-protest provocation resulted in a physical confrontation.

The crackdown against protests intensified throughout the last school year, culminating in the violent police dismantling of the encampment last

spring.

In response, professors from both Tulane and Loyola issued principled defenses of their students and colleagues and warning of the anti-democratic precedent being set by the university administrations in line with right-wing New Orleans and state authorities.

The Tulane faculty exposed the lies used by the university to justify their repression, stating, “I observed Tulane students engaging in peaceful and nonviolent demonstrations. Tulane’s administration is currently seeking to punish staff, students and faculty, who attended the encampment or have merely expressed private support for students to administrators. We demand Tulane stop criminalizing peaceful student protests. Lift student and staff suspensions and drop all criminal charges against members of our community.”

But the response of Tulane and virtually every other university across the US has been to double down on their suppression of political opposition. Far from being democratic institutions of higher learning, the universities have been largely transformed into financial institutions governed by Wall Street and ever more integrated with the military and intelligence agencies.

Tulane’s board of directors is composed of the representatives of the financial oligarchy and capitalist state, including Chair David Mussafer of the global private equity firm Advent International; Carol Lavin Bernick of Polished Nickel Capital Management; former Obama administration officials Lisa P. Jackson and Regina M. Benjamin; as well as Suzanne B. Grant, treasurer of the Zionist Jewish Federations of North America, which states on its website that it partners with Israel and other agencies to “secure the Jewish state.”

Tulane has numerous connections to the various arms of American militarism, including the National Guard Bureau Homeland Security Institute and the US Strategic Command Academic Alliance. Tulane is also one of three universities to receive a \$21 million grants under a partnership between the US Department of Energy and Israeli Ministry of Energy known as the “US-Israel Energy Center,” with research into fossil energy and cybersecurity infrastructure.

The subordination of higher education to the military, the capitalist state, and the financial oligarchy is what lies behind the intransigent response of the university

administration to the appeals and demands of students and even faculty. The ruling class will not give in to pressure from below. Instead, the growth of opposition to war and capitalism is driving the bourgeoisie to carry out openly dictatorial measures.

The current protest movement, having failed to stop either the genocide or the attacks on democratic rights, faces profound questions of political perspective and class orientation. The current strategy based on pressuring the universities, the politicians and the Democratic Party, which is the principal enabler of the genocide, is doomed to failure. Anger and opposition are not enough.

The middle-class forces and conceptions that presently dominate the protest movement, including those that attempt to explain the genocide in primarily racial and national terms, function to preempt a deeper historical and global understanding of the genocide, which is fundamentally rooted in the crisis of capitalism and the emergence of a new world war led by US imperialism.

Such an understanding, as outlined by the recent statement of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, “Ten months of the Gaza genocide: The way forward in the fight against war”, is essential for students as they confront an escalation of the genocide, the drive to dictatorship and the threat of world war. None of these questions can be resolved outside of the fight to end capitalism, and this requires that the struggle against war be linked with and based on the power of the international working class.



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