

Students speak out against violent police arrests of anti-genocide protesters at Western Sydney University

Our reporters
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Students and staff at Western Sydney University (WSU) attended a rally yesterday against the violent arrest of students protesting against the imperialist-backed Israeli onslaught against the people of Palestine and Lebanon.

A working-class university in Sydney's west, WSU has a large cohort of students from Middle Eastern backgrounds. Many are personally affected by Israel's ongoing bombardment which is being backed by the major powers including the US and Australia.

The brutal attack on students on Wednesday was followed by bellicose comments from the university administration and a major police presence at Friday's demonstration. Read the *World Socialist Web Site's* report of the protest here.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)—the socialist, anti-war club at WSU—interviewed students about the police assault on campus.

Zahraa called the violent arrests “a cowardly act against peaceful protests.”

“If they think that this is a way to protect their students and if they think that this is going to intimidate us, then they're very wrong. In fact, it only made us more passionate about what we're doing and know that we are even more right because of their actions.”

Zahraa condemned the Labor government and the university administration.

“This has been going on for a year now. They're constantly saying, ‘We want to support our citizens, we want world peace.’ But they're doing quite the opposite of that.

“If it goes on, it's going to lead to World War Three,” the student said. “I think everyone can see that.

We really cannot give up because people in Gaza are looking out to people overseas. They want people to hear them and we're showing them that we hear them.”

Sam told the IYSSE that students were arrested at a peaceful gathering. “Nobody was being violent, so what was the need to bring in cops and security?”

“When I walked into campus today, it was ridiculous. There were cops pulling up, there were guards all over, they were checking our IDs,” the student added.

“I know some people are nervous right now because they're afraid that degrees are threatened, or this or that is going to happen. But it's a good cause and I feel like right now we're deciding what side of history we want to be on.”

Another WSU student, **Blessing**, condemned the university for collaborating with the police against unarmed students.

“Especially at a university that wants their students to speak on oppression, to speak on injustice, to make the world a better place for people to have better lives... For police officers to come to the university armed—armed undercover police—to harass students is horrible. ... Watching the videos of a black man and an Arab man being slammed against a wall is horrible.”

When Blessing was asked why she thought students were arrested, she replied: “I think they did it to put fear into people trying to speak up, because they know that their involvement with Israel is very wrong. They know that they're on the wrong side of this.

“I think now, finally, people are starting to take matters into their own hands, because the people that we've put in place in Parliament are not trying to make a difference. The people that we've put in place are not representing our voices. I think the way forward now is

actually getting people who know more about this issue to actually be involved in Parliament. Or if Parliament doesn't want them to get involved, then students and other people have to take matters into their own hands."

Rana said: "I just feel like we have a right to protest. Genocide is genocide, you can't sugarcoat it. They're scaring people into silence and I just think it's not fair. We should be able to talk about it freely.

"The Labor Party say that they fight for humanity and that they care about their people, but at the end of the day if they're supporting genocide they don't care about anything except financial benefit.

"I see videos on Instagram and I feel like crying half the time because children, and not just children, women and men too, are being slaughtered for absolutely no reason. It's awful. It's just inhumane."

The IYSSE also spoke with two social work students who wished to remain anonymous.

One of them condemned the arrests, saying: "I think everyone has a right to express their views and have freedom of speech. If you block a certain person expressing their views, then it's not freedom of speech. It's injustice, especially if it's against marginalised groups."

The other agreed, adding: "The university is supposedly valuing freedom of speech and being democratic and valuing opinions and thoughts, but that's the opposite of what they're doing right now. What are we fighting for here? Whose side is the university on?"

The IYSSE also spoke with **Oonagh**, a recent graduate from the nearby University of Technology Sydney.

"It's completely shameful that any student protester has been arrested," Oonagh said. "We are simply here today, like they were on October 9, to say no to genocide, no to senseless killings, no to occupation and no to colonisation, and the irony is that we are the ones reprimanded for it.

"When I was on the way to this protest here today, I was warned by a group of students telling me to be careful. Obviously they're aware that there have been arrests on campus, and an arrest made this morning at a student's home. And I appreciate their warnings, but I don't think, as a protester and as an activist, I should be worried about standing up for what's right. We are moving closer and closer to an authoritarian state."



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