

Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee denounces arrest of anti-genocide student protesters

Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee
14 October 2024

The Western Sydney University (WSU) Rank-and-File Committee of staff and students strongly condemns the arrests of at least three WSU students last week for participating in a peaceful sit-in against the expanding Israeli massacres in Palestine and Lebanon.

We demand the immediate dropping of the trumped-up charges against the students of assaulting or resisting security guards or police. It was the police who violently arrested them and also physically assaulted students and staff members who tried to intervene.

This is a serious attack on fundamental democratic rights and the right to protest against the US-backed and armed Israeli genocide, not just on university campuses but anywhere.

This is at a university with a high proportion of students from working-class and Middle Eastern backgrounds. It marks an escalation of the attempts by the state and federal Labor governments to suppress all dissent against the escalating Israeli crimes, which these governments fully support.

Widely circulated mobile phone video footage of the arrests of two students shows the police dragging them out of the EB building at the WSU Parramatta South campus. One student was thrown against a wall, and the other was manhandled to the ground.

Undercover police disguised as students bared their guns to block students and staff from coming to the rescue of the students.

Two days later, on Friday morning, another student was arrested at her home, reportedly on charges of resisting a police operation. After being held for hours, she was released on bail later in the afternoon, but her bail conditions anti-democratically prohibit her from

contacting any member of the WSU4Palestine collective.

Many students and staff were shocked and outraged by the arrests and the police mobilisation, the largest ever seen at WSU.

Long before the protest began, large numbers of riot police and other armed squads had been deployed to various parts of the campus in the morning, confronting students and staff alike with the sight of paddy wagons ready to take away those to be arrested.

On Friday, a rally protesting the arrests was again surrounded by dozens of police and campus security guards. University security locked buildings and ordered students to present their IDs to be allowed to enter their classes.

Far from the protest events causing disruption or safety fears among students and staff, the aggressive and violent police operations did so. The police-state measures created an atmosphere of intimidation against students and staff, especially all those opposed to the Gaza genocide.

Last Wednesday's original protest was directed against the continuing refusal of the WSU administration, headed by Vice-Chancellor George Williams, to break its ties to Israel-linked companies and weapons manufacturers. Documents obtained via Freedom of Information laws show that WSU has investments in weaponised planes, naval weapons and lethal drones.

After a rally and march, about 25 students moved into classroom building EB and sat in one corner of the foyer asking to see Williams, whose office is upstairs. They were not blocking anyone using the EB building, which hundreds of students and staff were doing, but

the police attacked them anyway.

Later the remaining students were threatened with being arrested for “public nuisance” if they did not leave the large four-level building, even though they and other students have classes and study areas inside EB.

The police assaults are clearly a result of high-level decisions by the New South Wales (NSW) state Labor government, which controls the police force, working in partnership with the university administration.

That was effectively confirmed by comments published in the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper last Friday by WSU Chancellor Jennifer Westacott. She falsely accused the anti-genocide students of “anti-Semitism,” “hate speech,” “violence,” “intimidation” and causing “fear,” without citing a single example of such conduct.

“We will not tolerate these behaviours on our campuses,” she declared. “This is now a police matter and we are fully cooperating with the police investigation.”

Her charges were backed in the pages of the *Australian* by two prominent Zionist organisations, the Zionist Federation of Australia and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, whose co-chief executive Alex Ryvchin outrageously charged the students with being “only interested in war and Jewish destruction.”

Moreover, the WSU arrests are part of an intensified offensive by the federal and state Labor governments to vilify, threaten and try to shut down protests against the rapidly escalating Israeli onslaught.

A week earlier, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns and Victorian Labor leader Jacinta Allen each issued statements demanding that protests against the pulverisation of Gaza and Lebanon not proceed on October 6 or 7. Large demonstrations went ahead nevertheless, despite massive police mobilisations.

In other imperialist countries backing the genocide, like the US, Germany and Canada, peaceful anti-genocide protests on the campuses have been slandered as antisemitic, despite being joined by many anti-Zionist Jewish students, and met with violent police repression, in which thousands of students were arrested.

The Israeli barbarism in Gaza and Lebanon and the accompanying offensive against democratic rights is

part of the broader eruption of US-led militarism which is spiralling into a global war. That includes the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the transformation of Australia into a central base of operations for conflict with China, identified as the chief threat to American hegemony.

We condemn the silence of the campus trade unions, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), on the student arrests, which is in line with their opposition to any action to halt the genocide and the wider plunge into war.

It is also in line with the NTEU’s efforts to block any fight against the job destruction and pro-business restructuring at the WSU College, which is a blueprint for the transformation of the entire university.

The experiences at WSU further show that the genocide in Palestine, the mass killing in Lebanon and the broader war drive of imperialism, including the accompanying restructuring of universities, cannot be stopped by making appeals to university managements, the union bureaucrats or the governments responsible for these historic crimes.

To fight genocide, war and attacks on democratic rights, university staff and students have to turn to the working class as a whole, the only social force that can end the nightmare by overturning the governments responsible. That means a political fight against the Labor governments, imperialist war globally and the capitalist profit system itself.

We support the resolution advancing that powerful perspective which was adopted by a general meeting of students at WSU last Tuesday, convened by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

The WSU Rank-and-File Committee will discuss the arrests, in addition to our ongoing campaign against the WSU College restructuring and our opposition to the “Green Paper” transformation of WSU at our next meeting this Wednesday evening. If you would like to get involved, please contact us at: rfc.wsu@gmail.com



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