

Will they crush the biggest student movement since Vietnam?

May 2, 2024



In a matter of days, dozens of Gaza solidarity encampments have sprung up on over a hundred university campuses across the U.S. It's the biggest student movement since the anti-war protests that swept U.S. universities in the 1960s.

As encampments are erected across the country, students have peacefully called for divestment from Israel's oppression of Palestinians. In response, many school administrations are inviting police onto campuses to violently crack down on students.

For over six months, tens of thousands of Jews and countless other people of conscience have fought to end the genocide Israel is committing against Palestinians in Gaza. We continue to demand that the Biden administration end its support for the Israeli military.

The biggest student anti-war movement since Vietnam

As the movement for a ceasefire grows, students across the country have organized in the thousands to demand that their universities cut ties with Israel's apartheid regime. Over 100 Gaza solidarity encampments have been established on campuses across the country, reclaiming the space as

“liberated zones” and “popular universities for Gaza.” Student chapters of Jewish Voice for Peace have been involved in organizing at least 47 of these encampments.

At the **University of Chicago**, students established the “Popular University for Gaza” on the main quad of the University of Chicago campus. Painted boards bearing the messages “Disclose, divest, and repair” and “In solidarity with Gaza forever” have been erected around the encampment. At the **University of Minnesota**, hundreds of student protesters pitched dozens of tents on Monday, linking arms to protect the encampment after arrests were threatened.

And so on, at over one hundred campuses across the country.

In response to these peaceful student anti-war protests *against genocide*, many school administrations have invited police onto campus for violent crackdowns.

Violent repression at Columbia University and City College

At Columbia University, negotiations broke down and the university began issuing fresh suspensions on Monday. In response, hundreds of Columbia students and professors occupied Hamilton Hall, one of the buildings occupied by anti-war student protesters in 1968. Faculty linked arms with students to protect protesters inside.

Students renamed the occupied building “Hind’s Hall,” after 6-year-old Hind Rajab, who was murdered alongside her family by the Israeli military in Gaza. For hours, Hind was left to bleed out as Israeli forces fired on ambulances trying to reach her.

On Tuesday evening, the Columbia administration again called the cops on their own students. As student journalists were confined to Pulitzer Hall, and told they would be arrested if they left, hundreds of NYPD police clad in riot gear swarmed Columbia’s campus to forcefully disperse the encampment and remove the students occupying Hind’s Hall. Cops deployed an armored vehicle to gain entry to Hind’s Hall and brutalized the dozens of student protestors who were doing nothing but peacefully occupying a building on their own campus.

One video shows a protester being thrown down the stairs; another shows cops entering Hind’s Hall with their guns drawn to confront the unarmed student protesters inside. Just a few miles away, dozens of cops were deployed in a simultaneous raid to crack down on protesters at CCNY, where police also used excessive force against peaceful students, arresting dozens. Across the city, hundreds of protestors were arrested.

On air, a student reporter for Columbia’s radio station fought back tears at the news that Columbia President Minouche Shafik has requested the NYPD remain on campus for the remainder of the school year.

Violent repression at UCLA

At UCLA, the pro-apartheid organization Stand With Us crowdfunded tens of thousands of dollars to bus Zionist agitators to campus, where they surrounded peaceful student protesters and prevented them from leaving. In one video, a woman waving an Israeli flag is seen shouting at students: “Go to Palestine. I hope they rape you.”

On Tuesday evening, masked Zionist vigilantes from outside campus attempted to tear down the students’ encampment. They beat students with bats, threw bricks, sprayed mace, and shot fireworks at protestors, all while the LAPD stood by and watched. Later last night, UCLA student

journalists who were walking on campus were followed and assaulted by Zionist counter-protestors.

Violent repression across the country

As dozens of encampments are erected across the country, students peacefully calling for divestment from Israel's oppression of Palestinians are facing an increasingly violent crackdown by the state.

Police clad in riot gear have been called in to clear encampments by force, and over 1,000 students have been arrested in total. Videos taken of police raids have shown students and professors being thrown to the ground and handcuffed, shoved, beaten, and dragged by militarized police.

Across the country, cops are using pepper spray, rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas on students, many of whom are still teenagers, at the behest of the university administrators who claim to care for their safety. At Arizona State University, videos showed cops removing the hijabs of female Muslim protesters. At Tulane, mounted police rode through the student encampment.

Pro-Israel agitators are also doing everything in their power to smear protesters and get encampments shut down by force. When a man waving an Israeli flag showed up to Northeastern University's Gaza solidarity encampment and shouted "kill the Jews," the university had 100 pro-Palestine student protesters arrested in response. The Northeastern administration justified the crackdown in a statement citing this antisemitic threat — neglecting to specify that it was a pro-Israel provocateur making that threat.

It's clear that the only violence happening on U.S. campuses is being perpetrated by the state and Zionist agitators. Yet the U.S. media and pro-genocide politicians have gone to great lengths to portray peaceful, student anti-war demonstrations as violent, antisemitic mobs, in order to justify the increasingly brutal crackdown on the right to protest.

We can win — when we organize.

Attempts to smear the biggest student anti-war movement since Vietnam won't distract us from the urgent work at hand: ending the genocide in Gaza. Palestinians are digging with their hands to unearth the bodies of their loved ones wrapped in plastic and dumped in mass graves outside Nasser and Al-Shifa hospital, some of them with their hands bound, others still connected to cannulas. In the words of Palestinian writer Mohammed El Kurd, "We are dying. Focus."

Our movements continue to be inspired by these courageous students' steadfastness in the face of state violence and relentless attacks on their character.

Because when we organize, we see results. On Monday, after five consecutive days of demonstrations, students at Northwestern won a series of concessions from their university, including increased transparency around the school's investments. Back in New York, over 90 percent of Barnard students voted to divest from Israeli apartheid, and in Rhode Island, students successfully pressured Brown University administrators to hold a vote on divestment.

Our solidarity is stronger than those who seek to divide us and pit us against each other. But our work is only just beginning. Nearly seven months into the Israeli government's genocide, we are still fighting for a permanent ceasefire. As students across the country stand their ground and escalate their tactics under mounting state violence, it's critical that our movements keep the momentum we've built going, too.

Stand with students protesting genocide.

Students are being subjected to an increasingly violent crackdown for peacefully protesting. Here's three ways you can support them:

1. **Follow the leading student organizations on social media** and amplify their alerts and requests widely.
2. **Be ready to show up in-person when students need community reinforcements**, and be prepared to bring requested supplies.
3. **Look out for requests for financial support** from protestors facing state and institutional repression.

Reposted from Jewish Voice for Peace.