

Labor and Students Unite in Toronto in Solidarity with Palestine

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[Ontario Federation of Labour](#)

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If you have the impression that Zionist interests appear to be at war with those – like many students – who care about human rights, international law, defense of noncombatants and freedom of speech and expression, you would not be mistaken. Israel and its international loyal followers believe that the Zionist dream is in great peril, and they are ready to sacrifice everyone's rights, as well as unlimited civilian lives in Gaza, to prevent that from happening.

It may be the case that many of them are ignorant of the extent of Israel's genocide, or simply refuse to believe their own eyes and ears, but the repression that they are using to get their way is increasingly and inevitably impeding their own attempts. Such is the case with wealthy Zionist donors to universities, and equally to the politicians that control government universities and the media that manufacture consent.

I'm not speaking of Jews, of course, because Jews are at the forefront of both the support of and resistance against the Gaza genocide, and increasingly against Zionism itself. In the case of universities, the Zionist pressure on the administrations to shut down student protest, and their demands to divest from suppliers of weapons used in genocide, are meeting resistance not only from the students themselves, but by allies in organized labor, like UAW union at the University of California at Davis.

This alliance between students and labor appears to be growing, which is why I wish to bring to your attention the following development at the University of Toronto, which I think you will find truly inspirational. Please read the letter from the Ontario Federation of Labour, and see if you don't agree. Let's hope this becomes a deluge of similar actions.

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The Ontario Federation of Labour Open Letter to the University of Toronto President Meric Gertler

Dear President Gertler,

I am writing in my capacity as the President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), which represents 54 unions and one million workers in Ontario.

As the voice of Ontario's labour movement, the OFL unequivocally supports the right of students to engage in peaceful protest on campus, as they call for a ceasefire and divestment from companies that are complicit in war and occupation.

I was therefore disappointed to hear about your ultimatum to the student encampment at the University of Toronto: clear out by Monday at 8:00 a.m. or be in violation of a trespass notice.

As trade unionists, we know what good-faith bargaining looks like. You should, too. In most instances at the bargaining table, our members and your representatives have successfully negotiated numerous collective agreements, without resorting to strikes or lockouts.

The same approach should apply here. Negotiations must continue *in good faith*, and without threats of police intervention. The recent successful conclusions to the encampments at Ontario Tech University and at McMaster University, for example, shows what's possible.

By contrast, when administrators choose repression, it rightfully provokes a response well beyond the students. On Monday, thousands of academic workers at the University of California [went on strike](#) to protest their employer's use of violence to clear the encampments.

Universities should be where we learn to debate and disagree with each other *without the fear of violence*. For Canada's largest university to decide unilaterally when the debate should end, and when police repression should begin, is a betrayal of the values we claim to uphold.

Indeed, your own [Statement of Institutional Purpose](#) describes these values clearly:

Within the unique university context, the most crucial of all human rights are the rights of freedom of speech, academic freedom, and freedom of research. And we affirm that these rights are meaningless unless they entail the right to raise deeply disturbing questions and provocative challenges to the cherished beliefs of society at large and of the university itself.

This is a mandate to support the students, not repress them. In this spirit, I urge you to reverse course immediately, and choose negotiations and discussion over ultimatums and repression.

As a gesture of encouragement, I am calling on all trade unions and allies to join [a solidarity rally on Monday at 8:00 a.m. at the student encampment at the University of Toronto](#).

If, by then, you decide to move against the students, you'll have to go through the workers first.

Sincerely,

LAURA WALTON

President, Ontario Federation of Labour

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Laura Walton is the author of "[Students are making history. All of us should join them](#)," which appeared on [rabble.ca](#) on May 17, the one-month anniversary of the student encampment movement.

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