

State Repression and Palestine Solidarity

Destruction of encampments and the arrests of more than 3,000 students and faculty members has not stopped the movement for divestment

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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A nationally coordinated effort to shut down Palestine solidarity encampments across the United States on university and college campuses has further exposed the links between imperialism and the ongoing genocide which has resulted in the deaths of more than 35,000 people over the last seven months.

President Joe Biden has repeatedly stated that the U.S. ruling class and governmental support for the State of Israel remains "ironclad."

Such comments reflect clearly the indispensable role of the Zionist state in the overall geostrategic interests of the U.S. and its allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Biden administration attempts to rationalize the unconditional assistance to Tel Aviv saying that the settlers have "no place else to go" while never expressing any sympathy for the plight of Palestinians living under the domination of the Zionist government for 76 years.

The position of the current administration in Washington has alienated it from many people domestically within the rubric of the Democratic Party electorate. A campaign to abandon Biden through voting "uncommitted" in the primary elections was born in the state of Michigan which has a large Arab and Muslim American population.

This campaign, initially labelled "Listen to Michigan", garnered 101,000 votes during the primary elections in March. The same pattern has continued in other states, particularly those considered essential for a Democratic Party victory over former President Donald Trump in November.

Despite these rapidly unfolding developments on an electoral and mass level, the Biden White House along with the majority of politicians in both Houses of Congress have refused to heed the calls of the students and workers for an immediate ceasefire as well as a radical shift in U.S. foreign policy towards the Palestinians. It appears that the administration is willing to risk its own prospects for reelection rather than endanger the imperialist objectives in West Asia and North Africa.

On May 20, police at the aegis of the University of Michigan administration, tore down the Palestine solidarity encampment which had existed for several weeks. The removal of the encampment and solidarity activists at U-M represents a pattern implemented from California to Texas and New York state.

WSU Encampment Set Up

Despite this ongoing repression which has included the arrest and prosecution of students and faculty members on campuses around the country, at Wayne State University in the center of the city of Detroit, the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) on May 23 held a rally at the Welcome Center beginning at 5:30pm. After a series of speeches in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, hundreds marched down Warren Avenue to the campus mall where an encampment was established.



SJP march down Warren Avenue to WSU encampment

SJP is one of the organizations which for years have kept the flames of Palestinian liberation alive on campuses. It is being supported by a host of organizations at the encampment which is called the "Popular University for Palestine".

Whether the WSU encampment survives for one day or a month is immaterial. The existence of these manifestations is an indication of the widespread discontent with the foreign policy of the Biden administration. The students are demanding the disclosure of economic and political ties between WSU and the State of Israel. Once these disclosures are acquired, the students want the complete divestment from the apartheid state in Occupied Palestine.

Before the encampment was set up at WSU, a host of speakers were heard from various religious and political organizations including the Executive Director of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) Dawud Walid; Elena Herrada, a WSU alumni and community activist; a representative of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, among others. WSU police maintained a watchful eye over the encampment while not revealing what their response will be to the presence of the Popular University for Gaza.



SJP WSU encampment

The Detroit metropolitan area encompasses the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the U.S. This demographic is already playing a crucial role in domestic politics this election year.

One of the encampment organizers at WSU, Zeinab Aldhanem, [said that](#):

“We are here to say that we want divestment and we want our voices heard because our voices have not been heard and they’ve actually been trying to silence us with passing certain rules that target us specifically and our actions. So we set up camp and hopefully, we’ll be here until we have divestment from the Wayne State University funds.”

A statement issued to the press by WSU [officials noted](#):

“Earlier this evening, a small encampment of pro-Palestinian protestors was set up on our campus. It is an evolving situation, with public safety on site to ensure that it is peaceful, safe, and non-disruptive to our campus operations.”

However, over the last several weeks law-enforcement personnel have not been committed to the safety of students and faculty who are protesting against the higher educational ties with the settler-colonial regime in Palestine. Detroit police have been harassing Palestine solidarity demonstrations and in New York City, Mayor Eric Adams, has gone on record as being politically opposed to the demonstrations.

Detroit Police Attack Palestine Solidarity Activists Outside Biden Speech at the NAACP Dinner

Prior to the WSU encampment, hundreds demonstrated on Sunday May 19 outside Huntington Place in downtown Detroit. The protest was against the visit of Biden who spoke at the so-called “Freedom Fund Dinner” hosted by the local branch of the NAACP.

Since the early 1990s, the Detroit chapter of the NAACP through its leadership, has served as a bulwark against the popular will of the workers and youth of the city in their quest for decent housing, quality education and freedom from police repression. This grouping has not defended those who are being evicted from their homes in the corporate campaign of ethnic cleansing. They were absent from the demonstrations opposing police repression during 2020.

Police set up barricades around the entrance of the venue to prevent the activists from getting close to Huntington Place. One white Detroit police officer told a leading Palestinian American activist to “go back to Mexico.”

The following day it was reported in the local corporate media that the video clip of this incident had gone viral. It was later announced that the policeman who was taped making the insults was suspended with pay pending a more thorough investigation.

After the demonstration was over outside the NAACP dinner, several activists from the Detroit Will Breathe (DWB) were violently attacked by the police. One of the activists from DWB was tased while he was already in police custody, having been knocked to the pavement and handcuffed.

Several were ticketed and released while others were threatened with police violence and arrests. A press conference was held the following day by DWB where they denounced the actions of the police.

DWB is no stranger to police repression. The organization grew out of the George Floyd rebellion of 2020. After Floyd was brutally murdered by Minneapolis police before the world, mass demonstrations and rebellions erupted across the U.S. and internationally.

On many occasions protesters from DWB were beaten and arrested on the orders of former police chief James Craig. Through a series of court actions, DWB won a temporary restraining order against the Detroit police after three months of repressive measures during the summer of 2020.

In 2020, the administration of former President Donald Trump evoked the Insurrection Act, a slave-era law enacted in 1807. This law empowered the president to deploy federal troops to quell social unrest.

However, the social unrest was prompted by the blatant murder of African Americans by representatives of the state and private capital. Today, the mass demonstrations, encampments and electoral campaigns have been labelled by the Biden administration as “antisemitic”.

As in 2020, the White House and Justice Department are coordinating the attempts to crush the Palestine Solidarity Movement. These developments suggest that the U.S. remains a racist state committed to the continuation of the status-quo domestically and internationally.

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Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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