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As University of California anti-genocide strike expands, Trump's threat to crush protests underscores bipartisan crackdown



Anti-genocide protesters at the UC-Irvine encampment, May 15, 2024.

The strike by University of California academic workers against campus protest crackdowns is expanding Tuesday to two more campuses, UCLA and UC Davis. The widening of the strike, after the United Auto Workers initially called out only UC Santa Cruz last Monday, is due to the mass determination by the rank and file. It became clear by the end of last week that the union bureaucracy could not keep workers on the job at both campuses.

The expansion of the UC strike is an important step in the growing entry of the working class as the basic force against war and police repression. But workers must act independently of

the union apparatus to expand the strike to all 10 UC campuses, as well as the entire UAW membership, including in the auto factories.

The growing movement against war pits rank-and-file workers against both pro-war parties and the union bureaucracy, which functions as an extension of the White House and the Democrats. Under the guise of the so-called “standup strike” tactic, which was used last year to ram through mass layoffs in the auto industry, the UAW is deliberately limiting the struggle at UC as much as possible. The UAW bureaucracy has endorsed “Genocide Joe” and even worked with riot cops to shield him from protesters in a visit earlier this year to Detroit.

The Democratic Party, in turn, is working to bolster the credibility of the apparatus. On Friday, a press conference on Capitol Hill headlined “Unions Defend Free Speech on Campus” was addressed by officials from UAW Local 4811, as well as Democratic congresswomen Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, who is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America.

It was similar to another press conference last December, where Omar and Tlaib spoke alongside UAW President Shawn Fain, only minutes before the Democrats voted by 2-1 to approve a massive new military spending bill.

Tlaib and Omar, who are both Muslim, have been the target of racist political attacks. Tlaib, the only Palestinian American in Congress, was censured in Congress last November for speaking against the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Omar’s daughter was one of many students suspended for participating in protests at Columbia University. These measures are an attack on the rights of the whole population and must be opposed.

But together with the UAW bureaucracy, Omar and Tlaib are focused on loyally covering for the role of the Democratic Party in the genocide and the attack on free speech. At the press conference, the speakers denounced the attacks on students without indicating that this was being organized and directed from the Biden White House.

Above all, their concern is that the genocide and police assaults do not result in workers and youth breaking from this imperialist party. In an earlier speech, Omar put this most directly when she said last year, “The brand of our party, a party that prides itself on our defense of democracy and the most vulnerable at home and abroad is being damaged as the United States continues to support this massacre, this war.”

Tlaib was also a central figure behind the “vote uncommitted” campaign in the Michigan primary, claiming that a protest vote against Biden’s nomination would pressure him into backing off from support for Israel. Instead, in the weeks after the primary, the Democrats joined hands with Republicans to unleash the assault on campus protests.

Trump threatens to crush protests if elected

The bipartisan attack on students opposed to the genocide also contributes to an environment favorable for the growth of the extreme right. This was shown in a leaked speech by Donald Trump to donors, first reported Monday by the *Washington Post*.

Trump called the protests a “radical revolution” and pledged to the donors that “if you get me elected ... we’re going to set that movement back 25 or 30 years.” He also threatened to deport international students involved in the protests. “As soon as they hear that, they’re going to behave,” he growled. This was a repeat of a pledge he made last October.

Trump also praised the New York Police Department for violently dispersing the protests at Columbia University. This operation was organized by Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat and ex-cop.

Trump’s speech is a serious warning of the types of measures that are being prepared against domestic opposition. The proposal to deport protesters recalls similar measures enacted after the Russian Revolution in 1917, to which American capitalism responded with furious attacks on socialists and left-wing organizations.

It also shows how the police state methods against protests have emboldened the would-be Führer, who already attempted once to overthrow the Constitution and install himself as dictator on January 6, 2021. Trump currently leads Biden in the overall polls and in key battleground states and even among younger voters.

This is more an indication of the scale of disgust over the Democrats’ support for genocide than it is for support for Trump. But it also exposes as a fraud the claim that the Biden campaign is a bulwark against Trump and the extreme right.

According to a legislative tracker from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, five bills have been introduced in both houses of Congress specifically targeting pro-Palestine protests.

A bill introduced by J.D. Vance (Republican-Ohio) would bar federal funding for universities that do not quickly shut down protests. Another Senate bill would cut financial aid for students convicted of protest-related offenses, and a House bill would bar protesters from wearing masks to protect themselves from doxxing.

Two bills in the House sponsored by Andy Ogles (Republican-Tennessee) would deport students who took part in protests, with one bill sending protesters to the Gaza Strip, where they would face death by starvation or Israeli bombs.

In a statement to the *Post*, a Trump spokeswoman doubled down, absurdly attacking Biden for siding “with radical leftist Democrats like Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib” and supporting

“antisemitic [protesters] destroying our college campuses and threatening to undermine our democracy.”

In response, the Biden campaign attacked Trump from the right, declaring that Biden “stands against antisemitism”—in reality, peaceful protests against genocide—and the “security of Israel.” It added, “Donald Trump does not.”

But what is most striking is that Trump’s proposals are in basic continuity with what Biden and the Democrats are already doing. The attack on students also recalls Trump’s own assault on the George Floyd anti-police violence protests in the summer of 2020.

The bipartisan assault on opposition to genocide also bolsters genuine antisemites such as Trump himself. In 2017, he backed a neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Virginia, which featured chants of “Jews will not replace us.” Charlottesville police stood by as the fascists dominated the town, while police reacted violently to pro-Palestinian protests this year at the nearby University of Virginia.

The Democratic Party supports the genocide in Gaza because it is seen in ruling circles as one front in a global war to reassert declining American dominance. The main targets of this emerging World War III are Russia and China, raising the danger of nuclear war.

When he first took office only days after the failed coup attempt, Biden declared his support for a “strong Republican Party.” This meant the ruling class needed a bipartisan alliance to prepare American society for war. From the beginning, the Democrats’ main line of attack against Trump is not that he is a fascist but that he is seen as too soft on Russia. They have refused to seriously prosecute Trump or anyone else over their role in January 6 because they are terrified it would legitimize and encourage mass opposition to the whole pro-war political system.

But that is precisely what has to happen. A mass movement against imperialist war must be built in the working class.