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USA

Palestine Solidarity Student Movement in the USA: An Overview

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What an inspiration the student movement in solidarity with Palestine has been. For three weeks students in American universities have organized peaceful demonstrations in support of Palestine, established encampments, and occupied buildings in the biggest movement of its kind in decades. The movement has been national in scope, in 45 of our 50 states, involving 140 campuses, and well over 2,000 arrests.

The large, diverse, decentralized, non-violent movement has been driven by young people's horror at the genocidal war being carried out by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza. This has clearly been a humanitarian movement expressing solidarity with the Palestinians, calling for an end to the war, for stopping U.S. provision of arms to Israel, and demanding that universities stop investing in Israel's arms industry.

Many university administrators, politicians, and the media—pressured by the Zionist lobby—lied about the students and their activities calling them pro-Hamas, and anti-Semitic, and even characterizing them as terrorists in order to justify violent police attacks that injured and, in some cases, hospitalized students and professors. Not since the National Guard massacre s at Kent State (4 killed) and police murders at Jackson State (2 killed) both in 1970 have we seen such violence against student protestors.

What altruism we have seen. Some students have jeopardized their college education, their graduation, their student visas if they are immigrants, and risked their health and safety in the face of violent attacks by Zionists, rightwing organizations, and the police. The student protests, sometimes led by Students for Justice in Palestine (JS) and Jewish Voice for Peace, were passionately opposed to Israel's war, but were not anti-Semitic.

Each of the student encampments has been different. Some have been run and organized in a top-down manner by small, self-appointed leadership groups, while others have been open and democratic, with large committees or entire encampments making decisions. The construction and maintenance of the encampments, getting tents, providing food, organizing study groups, and establishing camp rules absorbed a great deal of time but also created a sense of community.

For most of the students, this was their first experience in a social and political movement such as this. On some campuses students engaged in ultra-left actions that provoked police intervention, though police have also attacked even the most peaceful groups. In other places students engaged in negotiations with university administrators. Some of those administrators made promises, more symbolic than significant to placate students and end the protests.

The Young Democratic Socialists of America and some other socialist have been active alongside JSP and JVP, but the left has not played a dominant role. Most of the student movement has not had time to discuss many of the central political questions in any depth. The groups have not taken positions on the nature of Zionism, on the politics of the Palestinian resistance and Hamas, and on the question of the relationship of the movement to American politics and the coming election. Nor has the movement developed clear plans for the summer much less the long term.

The Palestine Youth Movement, which has ties to the campist Party of Socialism and Liberation, has called for a People's Conference for Palestine in Detroit on May 24-26, 2024: Whether or not it will be a democratic conference capable of representing the social, cultural, and politics diversity of the movement remains to be seen. This student movement, like others in the past, will have an enormous impact on the lives of those who participated, on the

organizations involved, and on the future of the American left.

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