

300 RANK-AND-FILE MEMBERS OF PSC-CUNY STAGE MAY DAY SICK OUT FOR PALESTINE

May 1, 2024

On Tuesday, April 30, 2024, CUNY management called the NYPD to City College to clear out the Gaza Solidarity Encampment that students had organized there. Militarized NYPD cops executed a brutal crackdown on students, workers, and members of the CUNY community, whom Mayor Eric Adams and the university administration dubbed violent outside agitators.

Even as we condemn these actions, we remember the Five Demands around which the CUNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment mobilized: that CUNY divest from all companies complicit in the US-backed settler-colonial genocide Palestine; that it boycott academic exchange with Israel; that it affirm the right of the Palestinian people to national liberation and return; that it demilitarize all campuses and end ties with groups like CIA, NYPD, and ROTC; and that it restore CUNY's tuition-free status and adopt a fair contract for staff and faculty.

During the encampment's existence, witnessing the leadership of CUNY students and participating in teach-ins, picket shifts, and countless conversations moved us to heed students' calls to join them in taking real, material risks for justice in Palestine. On April 29, an assembly of CUNY workers voted to endorse the Five Demands. Those workers then voted to conduct a work stoppage in the form of a sick-out if 250 pledges were reached by 10 p.m. the next day. Despite New York's repressive Taylor Law, which renders job actions illegal in the public sector, more than 300 CUNY workers took the step of calling out sick on May Day. In a union that has not struck once in its 52 year existence, this represents a historic shift.

We organized this sick-out not only because we refuse to condone “business as usual” at our university but also because now is the moment to bring the power of U.S. labor—including academic labor—to the struggle for Palestine. We answer the calls for solidarity from our students, from Palestinian trade unions, and from Palestinian educators.

Our sick-out was in support of the Five Demands and a commitment to begin and sustain the work of building a more just university. As the Fifth Demand articulates, students and workers fight the same fight, and we can win only by building power together; thus, while PSC leadership has disavowed our action, we call on them to endorse the students' Five Demands.

We also call on PSC leadership to dedicate union resources to challenging legal or administrative repression against students, faculty and staff, including those of us participating in the sick-out. PSC leadership should commit to supporting students and workers facing escalating retaliation. Finally, we demand that charges against those arrested at CUNY be dropped, and that there be no legal or academic consequences for anyone arrested or engaged in Palestine solidarity organizing at CUNY. Free CUNY! Free Palestine!

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