

UNITED STATES

CUNY Rank-and-File Workers Stand With the Student Encampment

PSC-CUNY rank-and-file academic workers held an open assembly at the CCNY Gaza solidarity encampment, where they voted unanimously to endorse the five demands of the students.

James Dennis Hoff and Olivia Wood | April 30, 2024



Last night, a group of about 200 members of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC-CUNY), the union representing faculty, graduate assistants, and several staff titles at the City University of New York (CUNY), gathered at the CUNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment for an open-air assembly to discuss how to use our labor power to build the movement for Palestine and fight against the

repression of the movement. There they heard from undergraduate student organizers of the encampment and debated, discussed, and voted on what steps the union should take to help build the student movement for Palestine and to win the Five Demands that are being advanced at the CCNY encampment.

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That moment when more than 150 rank and file PSC CUNY members voted yes for the union to support the 5 demands of the CCNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment.

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The assembly began with undergraduate student organizers explaining the Five Demands of the encampment and giving impassioned speeches on the importance of organizing for Palestine, the connections between struggles at CUNY and struggles in Gaza, and the relationships between students and workers in the movement. Students mentioned the PSC's 2021 **resolution** in **support of Palestine** and called on union members to back that statement up with real action. Next, the assembly moved to an open-mic discussion of the students' comments and a debate of what to do next.

Over the next hour, dozens of PSC members stood up to express their support for the **five demands**, the importance of bringing labor unions into the struggle, **building for May Day**, and heeding the call of the **Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions** to build a national strike for Palestine. Several speakers also called upon the union leadership to endorse the encampment and to mobilize the entire 30,000 members of the union to organize pickets to defend the students.

Afterwards, PSC members voted unanimously to support the five demands and to call on the PSC to do the same. As hand after hand was raised in support of this first and important vote the crowd erupted into cheers and chants of "disclose! Divest! We will not stop, we will not rest!" echoed through the campus.

PSC members then voted on a series of other proposed resolutions that included:

- 1. The PSC should endorse the five demands.*
- 2. As students call on CUNY faculty to begin an academic boycott, we will pledge to begin, already and autonomously as workers, an academic boycott of Israel.*
- 3. Organize a "picket to protect" the encampment on Tuesday, April 30, highlighting the five demands.*
- 4. Call on PSC to [hold] assemblies in each union chapter to discuss the encampment's five demands.*
- 5. Call on PSC to allow encampment organizers to speak at the May 9 delegate assembly.*

Most of these also passed unanimously, but the last proposal to organize a sick-out of CUNY faculty and staff on May Day generated a heated debate. Many members felt that it would be better to hold classes at the encampment, while others worried that building a sick-out with such small forces could subject members to repression from the administration. Unsurprisingly, many members also raised the specter of the anti-union Taylor Law, which prohibits public sector workers from striking. Some argued that the penalties of the law were too great to challenge without a majority of the union on board, while others claimed that the only way to ever defeat the Taylor Law was to push the boundaries of the law in order to eventually break it outright.

In response an alternative proposal was put forward and passed. That proposal, which is **circulating across the union now**, asks members to agree to a sick-out on May Day if a baseline of 250 members agree to participate. Unsurprisingly, the leadership of PSC-CUNY wasted no time issuing a statement condemning and distancing themselves from the proposed work stoppage, a move that not only gives lie to the fake progressive veneer of the union bureaucracy, but which actively puts our members in harm's way. Such a decision by the union bureaucracy, which was all but absent from last night's demonstration, reveals what an impediment they are to building a real class struggle union and why we need to build the independent power of the rank and file.

Despite zero efforts by the official PSC to help organize it, the assembly was nonetheless one of the largest rank-and-file gatherings of PSC-CUNY members in years, demonstrating that we can build union power not only during contract struggles, but by regularly engaging in struggles against all forms of oppression. That solidarity makes us all stronger.

The event was co-organized by encampment leaders working together with organizers from the CUNY On Strike campaign, which has been organizing toward a union-wide strike since November as part of the PSC's ongoing contract negotiations. Many union members who are organizing with CUNY On Strike are also participating in the encampment and are attempting to forge stronger ties between the students and the workers, much as faculty and student workers at fellow New York City schools like Columbia, Barnard, NYU, and The New School have done and are doing through their own unions.

 **CUNY** | **NYC** | **Palestine** | **Repression** | **Repression of the Palestine Movement** |



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