

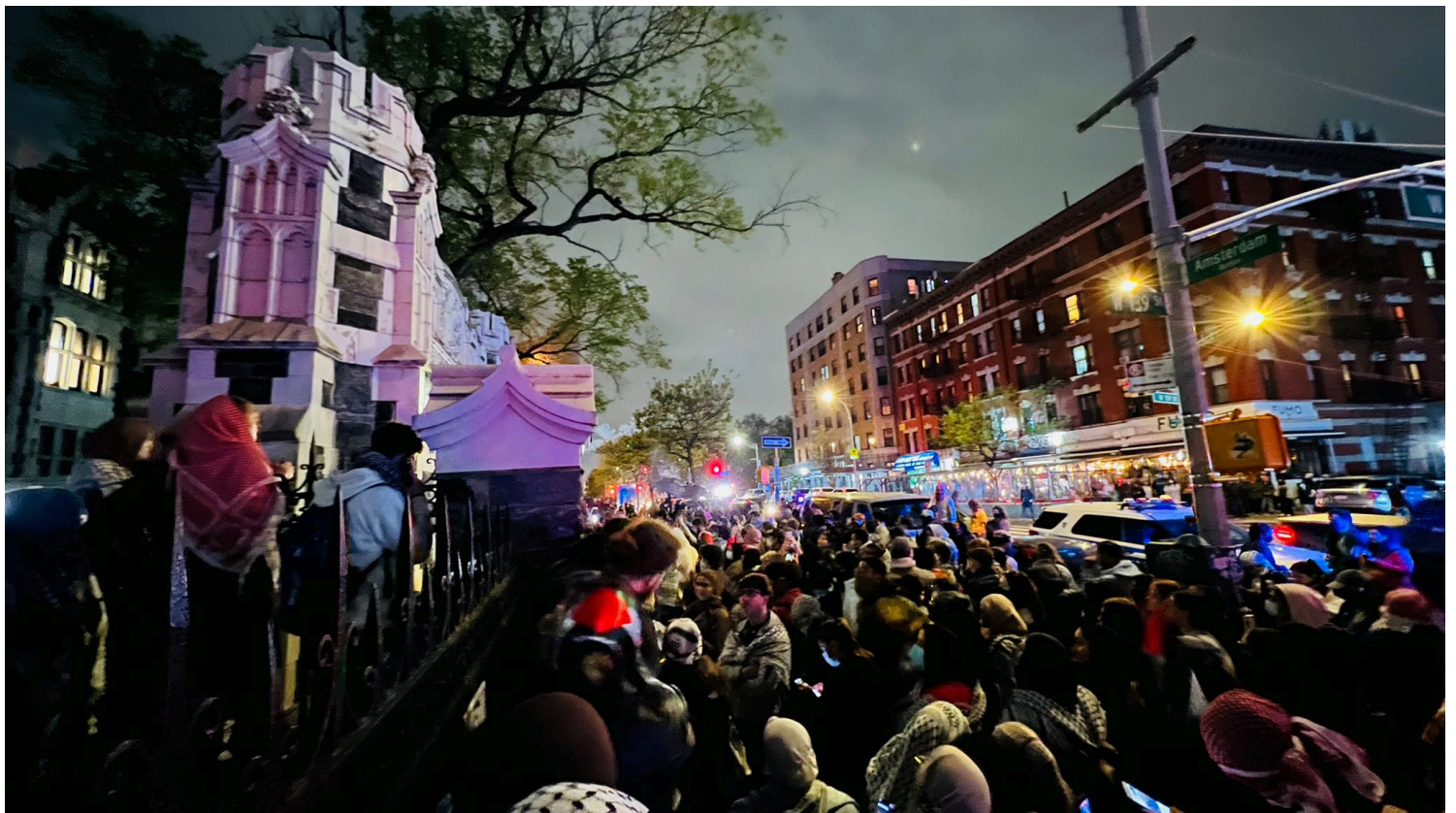
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LABOR MOVEMENT

City University of New York Workers Announce Wildcat Sickout After NYPD Arrests Over 100 of Their Students and Colleagues

CUNY workers announced a wildcat sickout after NYPD raided City College's Gaza Solidarity Encampment. It's the first known job action in the PSC union's 52-year history.

Left Voice | May 1, 2024



In the evening of Tuesday, April 30, hundreds of New York Police Department (NYPD) officers from precincts all over New York City assembled in Harlem to raid both Columbia University and the City College of New York. The university presidents had invited the police force onto campus

to forcibly remove the Gaza Solidarity Encampments at each school and the students at Columbia occupying “Hind’s Hall,” normally known as Hamilton Hall but renamed by student activists after a **6-year-old girl in Gaza** who was killed by Israel tanks while surrounded by her dead family members in their car.

The schools are approximately 20 blocks apart. After police finished their assault on Hind’s Hall, entering through an upstairs window **with guns drawn** before arresting the student activists, many of them moved uptown toward City College. Activists at both schools estimate at least 100 people were arrested from each one, including students and faculty.

City College is normally an open campus, one that requires City University of New York (CUNY) IDs to enter the buildings but not the grounds. A few days ago, the college set up temporary fencing around all of the entrances that had not already been locked, and last night, they began guarding the exit points, allowing people out but not in. Police violence and arrests occurred both inside and outside of campus.

Marc Kagan, an adjunct faculty member at CUNY’s School of Labor and Urban Studies, described some of what happened outside the gates in an email sent Wednesday morning:

The police presence was overwhelming. A couple of hundred in riot gear massed on Amsterdam [Avenue] easily broke up perhaps twice as many demonstrators, just surging into the crowd and randomly pulling people out for arrest, then pushing the rest of the crowd this way and that at will. Dozens more were deployed on every side street and far more than that at the two ends of Convent [Avenue].

Monday evening, unionized CUNY workers, organized with the Professional Staff Congress (PSC-CUNY, AFT Local 2334), had an **assembly to discuss the situation and vote on next steps**. The most controversial proposal — which passed after much discussion — was to hold a sick-out on Wednesday, May 1, International Workers Day, if at least 250 members of the bargaining unit scheduled to work that day pledged to do so by 10pm on Tuesday.

In Kagan’s view, “The encampment-faculty/staff meeting the night before [the brutality] was, I think, a preliminary and nascent example of the type of real union/student relationships we would need to build to ever realize the prospect of a People’s CUNY. That is, one that is fully funded and substantially less hierarchical.”

Shortly after 10:00 PM, messages went out through email and on social media: the threshold had been reached, the pledge’s signatories had been verified as members of the bargaining unit, and the sickout was on.

In addition to being the will of the assembly, the action responds to the **call from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions – Gaza** for the workers of the world to mobilize on their behalf for May Day. As one chant heard at the CUNY encampment goes, “Gaza calls, CUNY answers!”

Under New York State’s **Taylor Law**, which governs labor relations for public employees in New York City and bans public sector strikes, a sick-out counts as an illegal job action. As far as the PSC members we spoke with know, this is the first job action in the PSC’s 52-year history.

One PSC member who preferred to remain anonymous, upon being released from 1 Police Plaza in the early hours of Wednesday morning, said, “I don’t even give a fuck about being arrested, I care about the first ever PSC job action and that it’s for Palestine!”

It remains to be seen whether the university will choose to pursue legal or disciplinary action against workers participating in the sickout. The PSC has already issued a statement disavowing the action and discouraging members from participating, but the comments on the **Instagram version of the statement** are almost unanimously negative, with one commenter remarking that “These are the most unanimous comments I have ever read. I hope the PSC is heeding this vote of no confidence in the leadership.” Even after the 10:00 PM deadline passed, more members continued to sign the pledge.

CUNY workers are furious and heartbroken, just as their colleagues across the country whose campus encampments have also faced police brutality in the last two weeks are furious and heartbroken. Many intend to mobilize for the May Day march for Palestine at 4:00 PM this afternoon in Foley Square, alongside other sectors of the working class of New York, including UAW members who work at Columbia University, Barnard College, New York University, and The New School.

As PSC members organizing for Palestine love to chant, “Arab, Jewish, Black, and white, workers of the world unite!”

 **CUNY** | **Higher Education** | **Palestine** | **Repression of the Palestine Movement** |

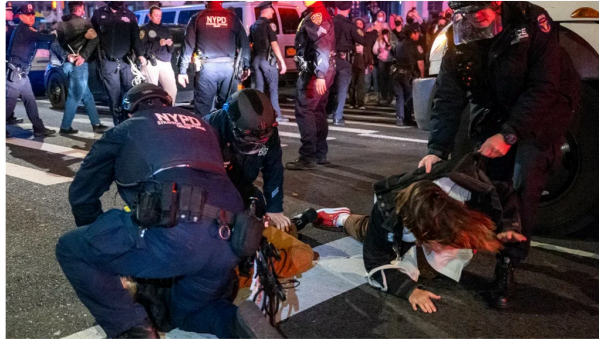
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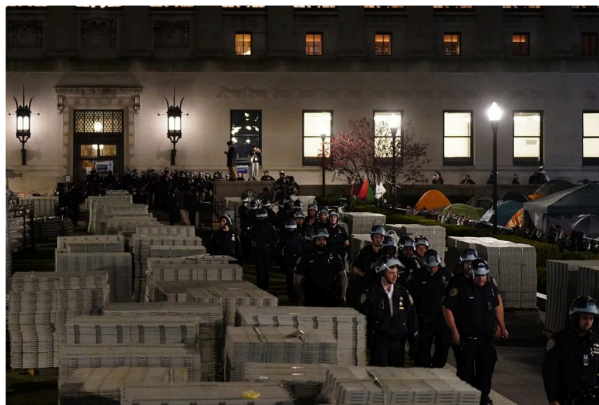
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