

World first as New School faculty establish Gaza solidarity encampment

8 May 2024

Ben Hillier

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New School faculty in New York City begin their encampment PHOTO: Ben Hillier

In what is a first for the United States, and perhaps the world, staff members at The New School, a private university in New York, today established their own Gaza solidarity encampment. They have committed to support suspended students and to back their calls for divestment from Israel.

In the foyer of the University Center building at the corner of 5th Avenue and East 13th Street, several tents have been assembled and faculty members are painting placards. One staff member, who wanted to remain anonymous for the time being, tells *Red Flag*:

“[We] decided to set up an encampment today in continuation with the demands for divestment from the Israeli war machine that our students started. So we are standing in solidarity with our students. And not just our students, of course—students around the country and around the world.

“On university campus after university, around this city and beyond, the police have been called in and have engaged in violence, in aggressive mass arrests. The New School, the alleged school of social justice, was no different.

“Last Friday morning, very early, the university president called in the police to wake the students and they arrested more than 40. So we are standing where our students stood because they have been suspended—many of them are no longer allowed on this campus.

“We are calling for the immediate revocation of any disciplinary measures against these students and standing with their profoundly moral demands. We stand with the call for divestment as bombs fall

on Rafah—600,000 people trapped, children trapped, 44,000 already dead.

“Our students led the way. It’s our time to step up, follow them and join them.”

Reportedly, there are more than two dozen staff committed to staying overnight. But the support extends far beyond this number. As previously reported in the **New School Free Press**, more than 200 staff met on 3 May to cast votes of no confidence in university President Donna Shalala, the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees.

At the time of writing, the university administration has not issued a statement on the staff encampment. The faculty move comes just fourteen hours after the **last New York City Palestine solidarity student encampment was cleared**.

Outside on 5th Avenue, two student organisers—AJ and Aisha—are part of a contingent of staff and students chanting and cheering on the new encampment, less than a week after theirs was dismantled by police. How do they feel watching tents blossom again?

“We always knew the fight wasn’t over. And so it’s pretty fucking beautiful to see this”, Aisha says. “The faculty are stepping up. The faculty are putting their bodies on the line. This time, we’re very happy to be in solidarity with them. We’re very happy to be in this fight with them.

“The faculty inside have been with us for some time and are just showing up in a different way now—and we’re very glad to have them.”

Of course, a student occupation is one thing—a staff encampment is quite another.

As is often the case, there are more questions than answers at this point:

Will more staff—and students—join this encampment?

Will staff at other universities follow suit?

How quickly will the administration move against New School faculty?

The answer to this last question will no doubt determine, in part, answers to the first two.

AJ is optimistic about the prospects.

“Our movement started with a handful of people. Even at the original Columbia encampment, it was a handful of students who were willing to be brave and risk something”, he says.

“It opened the floodgates for hundreds to come and support them. At Columbia, in the first days, the students who organised the club and encampment were pretty much immediately suspended and

were not allowed back on campus. But it sparked what we have now which is like an unbelievable uprising.

“There’s a handful [of faculty] in there that are opening the door the same way we did. I’m really proud of them and I’m really excited.”

There are, however, greater barriers to a staff movement taking off. Students in general have a higher degree of freedom and flexibility in their lives, and fewer financial commitments. They also can act as a minority with greater abandon.

A broad faculty encampment movement seems unlikely, particularly seeing that it’s now the end of the teaching year and many staff will have to find other jobs over the summer.

Then again, sometimes you just never know. After all, last night we were talking about the end of NYC encampments altogether. And now this world first comes out of the blue.

Even if things go south from here, the encampments, AJ acknowledges, are but one tactic of the movement.

All power to them.

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