

## UNITED STATES

# CUNY Workers and Students Will Write A New Chapter of Class Struggle This Semester

As a new semester begins, there is so much to fight for.

Tatiana Cozzarelli | August 28, 2024



Another school year is starting at the City University of New York (CUNY). We'll arrive on campuses that are dilapidated and falling apart. Broken elevators and escalators plague campuses across the city. Some departments are in a last-minute scramble to hire adjuncts for classes. It's an affront to us as workers and to our students who deserve a quality education.

Even though I've spent all week preparing for the semester, adjuncts and many others don't get paid until two weeks into the semester. I have \$30 in my bank account and I have to borrow money from friends again. Some adjuncts are on food stamps. Adjunct wages — and wages for most CUNY faculty and staff — are just not enough. We've been working with an expired contract for a year and a half, which means a year and a half without raises despite skyrocketing inflation and cost of living in New York City.

Such is the start of the school year at CUNY.

As I realize that none of the outlets in my windowless classroom work, it's hard not to think about the billions of dollars being sent to kill Palestinians. There are no universities left in Gaza. The summer has passed and now Vice President Kamala Harris is at the top of the ticket against Donald Trump, but the genocide continues unabated. The lights in my classroom are not working, and I think about all the money being spent on concentration camps for migrants and how both Trump and Harris are **in a competition** for who can be most chauvinist and militaristic.

Our union leadership has done almost nothing to organize our members to confront the genocide. Some union leaders say we can't take a political stand. But our parent union, the AFT, is endorsing and campaigning for Harris, who is responsible for this genocide. According to these union bureaucrats, we're allowed to be political, just as long as it's in the interest of capitalism.

As we begin the semester there are still community members facing felony charges from the Gaza solidarity encampment at **City College** last semester. The Chancellor just sent an email saying that there is no room on campus for "anti-Israel sentiment" — seemingly equating speaking out against the Israeli state with antisemitism — a widely debunked claim, including by Jewish activists who have been organizing for Palestinian liberation. We'll face increased policing and increased persecution of student organizations as an attempt to silence our voices. We're already seeing increased repression at campuses across the country: at New York University, the student code of conduct equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Various branches of Students for Justice in Palestine have been banned across the country, including at Rutgers University and George Washington University.

University administrators and the bipartisan regime want to crush the rising and radicalized voices of a new generation. We can't let them. We must fight against repression — demanding from our unions and student organizations that we fight with one fist against this repression across New York City and across the country.

We'll need to demand that our unions become fighting forces, not campaigning machines.

I think back to the encampments of last semester. The sun shining on the banner with the 5 demands: divest, free CUNY, cops off campus, and more. Kids coloring, leading chants and running around. The feeling was electric, as the world felt big and anything felt possible. A small taste of freedom. The knowledge that we are part of something bigger — an international

movement of students, faculty and staff questioning Zionism, imperialism, and even capitalism itself. The feeling that the past and the present were meeting in that moment: harkening back to **the radical history of CUNY** and the 1969 occupation at City College, which won open admissions.

I think about the possibility in the assembly of hundreds of faculty and staff. Just a month before, when CUNY on Strike had a panel about the assemblies in the **1999 Mexican UNAM strike**, a mass democratic assembly seemed impossible to some. But just a month later, we held an assembly where we heard from students in the Gaza Solidarity encampment, we discussed, we debated and we voted for **the first sickout** in the history of our union. The sun was setting on City College as hundreds of faculty, staff and students chanted **“disclose, divest, we will not stop, we will not rest.”**

These feelings of freedom and possibility show us the kind of university we need to fight for.

We want a different kind of university. One that isn't run like a business — with no investments in Zionism, fossil fuels, the military-industrial complex, or corporations that exploit our students and their labor. One without the racist police on campus. One where the knowledge produced should be in the service of the working class of New York City and the world, not of capital.

And we want a fully funded university which ends tiered labor and pay disparities for the same work. We need high wages that rise with inflation, for everyone, including adjunct professors, janitors, and office assistants. We know the money is there: It's in the pockets of the billionaire capitalists, in the spending for the military-industrial complex and the police. We will fight to yank that money away and use it for us.

We want a university that is free and public. One where CUNY students get stipends to study, being able to dedicate all their time to study and self discovery; being a full time student should not be a privilege for the wealthy. We want a university that is run democratically by students, faculty, staff and the community. We need a different kind of union; one that is independent from the Democratic Party, which is responsible for the genocide in Gaza, alongside the Republicans, and is responsible for our low wages and defunded CUNY. We need a union that really fights for workers and is willing to break unjust laws, like the undemocratic **Taylor Law**. A union on the side of working-class and oppressed people, on the side of a free Palestine. We need a democratic union, organized by assemblies at the rank and file.

Last semester, we wrote a new chapter in class struggle, in the history of the movement, in the history of “the People's CUNY.” I am reminded that history moves in leaps and the student and labor movement will rise, bigger, stronger, and wiser than before. As we start this semester, struggling under the weight of low wages and an under-funded university, we know new chapters of class struggle will be written with the strength of the working class united with the students and community, we will win.

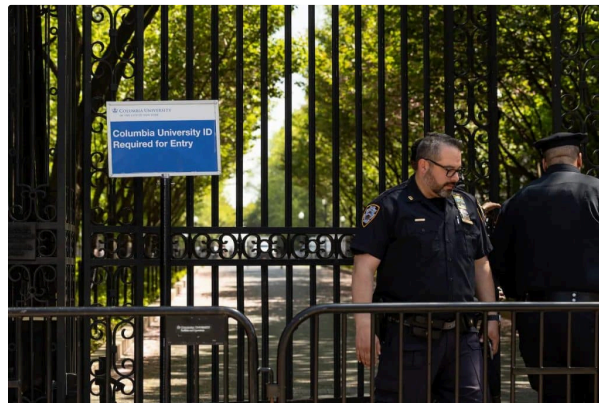


### **Tatiana Cozzarelli**

Tatiana is a former middle school teacher and current Urban Education PhD student at CUNY.

## **UNITED STATES**

---

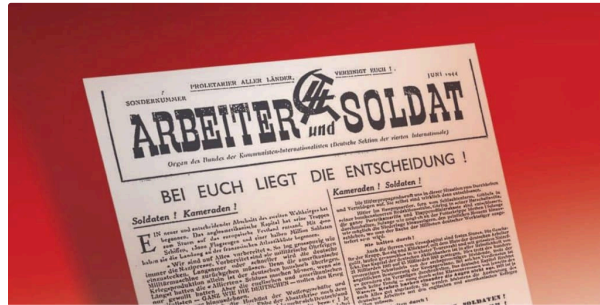


## **As Classes Start, Universities Begin a New Wave of Repression Against the Palestine Movement**

Maryam Alaniz | August 24, 2024

## **MOST RECENT**

---



## A Conference to Remember Trotskyist Resistance Fighters in France

Nathaniel Flakin | August 22, 2024



### SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER