

...continued (uncommitted)

The organizers of the “uncommitted” campaign deliberately presented it as a chance to cast a protest vote without supporting an alternative candidate to Biden. In tactical and electoral terms, this was a smart move, as it undercut the “a vote for ‘uncommitted’ is a vote for Trump” argument.

However, it has limitations as a longer-term strategy, as it feeds back into electoral politics within the Democratic Party. For example, the Michigan vote led the fringe candidate Marianne Williamson to “unsuspend” her campaign. Socialists are critical of working within the Democratic Party, but at least figures such as Bernie Sanders and AOC identify as socialists, and have some kind of supporter base, whereas Williamson is, frankly, irrelevant; her vote actually went down in some states after her “unsuspension.”

The primary vote shows that there is potential for a popular campaign against the war in Gaza. “Uncommitted” votes of around 10-20% may not sound much, but they are enough for a critical mass to take the movement forward. After all, in 1965 only a quarter of Americans opposed sending troops to Vietnam, yet by the end of the decade mass protest had helped to end the war. Crucially, the movement took on the Democratic president Lyndon B. Johnson and his party, most famously in the riots outside the party convention in Chicago.

We need something similar today. We need a campaign that transcends the limitations of the Democratic Party and electoralism on the one hand, and the sectarianism of much of the US “anti-war” left on the other. And if anyone wants ideas for a time and place to protest, may I suggest this year’s Democratic National Convention? — in Chicago.

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CHANTS AND SLOGANS

BE HEARD! SOME SELECT CHANTS AND SLOGANS TO TELL THE WORLD GENOCIDE WILL NOT STAND!

"FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA, PALESTINE WILL BE FREE!!"

**"ISRAEL OUT OF WEST BANK,
ISRAEL OUT OF GAZA,
ISRAEL OUT OF PALESTINE,
LONG LIVE THE INTIFADA"**

**"JOE BIDEN, GET OUT,
WE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT.
GENOCIDE, WAR
YOU DON'T HAVE OUR VOTE ANYMORE!"**

**"DIVEST, SANCTION, BOYCOTT!
THIS IS WHAT THE STUDENTS WANT!"**

**"COME AND JOIN US,
PICK A SIDE!
DON'T STAND BY THROUGH GENOCIDE"**

**"MOVE COPS, GET OUT THE WAY
WE KNOW YOU'RE ISRAELI TRAINED"**

**"YOU'RE COMPLICIT, UC
SPENDING MY TUITION,
KILLING KIDS LIKE ME"**

**"1 2 3 4 OCCUPATION NO MORE!
5 6 7 8 SMASH THE ZIONIST SETTLER
STATE"**

**"NOT ANOTHER NICKEL
NOT ANOTHER DIME
NO MORE FUNDING ISRAELI CRIMES"**

**"NOT ANOTHER CENT
NOT ANOTHER DOLLAR
NO MORE MONEY FOR ISRAEL'S
SLAUGHTER"**

MARX 21 Special Bulletin - College Encampment Edition

FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA!

College encampments for Palestine show the way

April 26, 2024
Eric Fretz

The struggles over encampments and occupations on US campuses have ignited the already unprecedented movement for Palestinian solidarity in the United States. Gaza has been under genocidal bombardment for over six months, with well over 34,000 Palestinians killed, vast sections of the encircled enclave in ruins, over 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people displaced, and over one million living through forced starvation — all as Genocide Joe Biden signs another \$26 billion in aid for Israel.

If the spoiled ballots and “uncommitted” votes in the Democratic primaries showed how Biden’s support for Israel has turned people away from voting for him, the wave of attention to the campus encampments calling for divestment is giving people an example of how change can be made — outside of the ballot box.

Large and small demonstrations and civil disobedience actions have been countless and ongoing, but the explosion of actions on campus has brought attention to a new level. A joint statement from student groups in Gaza has expressed solidarity and thanks to the “Student Intifada in the United States.” As we write there are between 30 and 40 campus encampments for Palestine across the country, and the number is growing.

In New York City alone actions and occupations have spread from Columbia to at least six other campuses. College professors and other educators have shown support for the students. And off campus, after a remarkable “Seder in the Streets to Stop Arming Israel” for the Jewish holiday of Passover, bus drivers with Transit Workers Union Local 100 refused police requests to drive buses of the hundreds arrested.

Up till now, both Arab-led and Jewish-led groups have organized magnificent demonstrations and actions. But there has been a lack of open, democratic spaces where different people can learn from each other and debate strategy for the movement. The occupations create such a space — although administrations have increasingly been closing down campuses to non-students, and attacking peaceful camps to stop that from happening.

Christian nationalist House Leader Johnson was silenced by boos at Columbia when he called for National Guard intervention, but the call has been mirrored by other politicians, Democrat as well as Republican. Such a move would further enrage protesters and sympathisers, recalling the killings at Kent State, and would probably face significant opposition from individual enrolled in the National Guard. In Georgia, police violently arrested students at an Emory University encampment, using a chemical irritant, tasers, and reportedly rubber bullets. Faculty are voting on a “motion of no confidence” in the College president over “unpresidential” use of force, and “false statements” by the administration. Almost 100 were arrested at LA’s University of Southern California. Multiple students were injured during violent overnight arrests of over 100 from the encampment at Emerson College in Boston, with the liberal Democratic mayor backing the police.

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Persistent resistance and solidarity have given the protesters the upper hand. If the violence of the state succeeds in shutting down these encampments, and administrations get away with banning pro-Palestinian organizations, it will be the wedge of a larger attack on the left, and any anti-racist voices and dissent. If we hold out, it will continue reverberating far beyond the campuses. It can mean an explosion in successful Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaigns, it can provide inspiration for Palestine actions by workers, unions and workplaces, it can be a step forward for other activists and the left in general, and it will be a large contribution to a movement that could break the US government's unquestioned support for Israel. This is the biggest contribution we can make to Palestinian liberation.

-end.

Michigan: “Uncommitted” to Biden and Genocide

March 10, 2024
Mike E.

The morning of Michigan's primary elections, I received a text from the Biden campaign, which had somehow gotten hold of my phone number. "Voting 'uncommitted' only helps Donald Trump" it read. This represents a new step in the gaslighting of left-wing voters by the Democratic establishment: first, voting Green was "helping Trump;" then voting for Bernie Sanders was "helping Trump;" now voting for nobody at all is "helping Trump." Clearly the Biden campaign was scared, but why?

A coalition of pro-Palestinian groups and activists were calling for a vote for "uncommitted" in the Michigan primary to protest Biden's refusal to call for a ceasefire in Gaza. The target was 10,000 votes — the margin by which Trump won in 2016, when Michigan was a key swing state. Nobody expects many pro-Palestinian voters to support Trump, given his history of Islamophobia and support for Israel. But it would not take many voters staying at home in disgust to lose Biden the state — and maybe the election.

The next day, it was clear that the "uncommitted" campaign had spectacularly exceeded its target. 10,000 votes? Make that 100,000! The media was forced to take notice; even the French news channel France 24 had the Michigan primary as one of its lead stories. Many commentators credited the result to Michigan's relatively large Arab and Muslim population. But fewer than 3% of Michiganders are Arab-American, and around 2.5% Muslim, while over 13% of voters supported "uncommitted."

Did this have any impact, however? It was essentially a symbolic protest vote which will have little effect on the Democratic National Convention in August (only two out of the state's 117 delegates will be "uncommitted.") But, as we have seen, it scared the Democratic establishment enough to focus its campaign on Michigan (which is more than they did in 2016). After months of the administration refusing to say the word "ceasefire," Kamala Harris called for just that only days after the primary. Of course, her idea of "ceasefire" is a temporary pause in the killing, and even that looks unlikely to happen. But it reflected the party's fear of losing the support of its base over Gaza.

More significantly, the Michigan vote has given momentum to the campaign. On "Super Tuesday" the following week, in Minnesota 19% voted "uncommitted," while "no preference" received about 12% of votes in North Carolina, and over 9% in Massachusetts. As in Michigan, the protest vote was much larger than the percentage of Arab-Americans (0.2% in Minnesota; 1% in Massachusetts) or Muslims (2% in both states). On Wednesday, March 6 "uncommitted" received 29.1% of the vote in Hawaii. The genocide in Gaza was again the major issue, even with the low percentage of Arab voters, but anger over class issues highlighted by the Maui wildfire may have also played a part.

The "uncommitted" movement has spread to the primaries in Georgia and Wisconsin — both battleground states like Michigan. It is also on the ballot in 14 other upcoming Democratic primary races. Significantly, the United Food and Commercial Workers, Washington state's largest union, is calling for an "uncommitted" vote there on March 12. It remains to be seen whether this momentum will shift the Democratic Party or create a mass campaign in solidarity with Palestine.

Continued (uncommitted)...

Disclose, Divest: What have the encampments won?

May 18, 2024
Clare Fester

Students at over 130 college campuses across the country have camped out the last month demanding the university disclose their weapons manufacturing investments and divest from the Israeli genocide machine. The encampments have already had a huge impact, drawing national and international attention to the brutality of Israel's occupation. Now students have forced over a dozen universities to the negotiating table.

Encampment victories

The concessions vary across campuses. The administrations generally accept demands like widening curriculum about Palestine, creating community spaces for Arab and Muslim students, and in some cases, disclosing investment information and supporting amnesty for arrested students. Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee got their chancellor to publicly support a ceasefire.

The demand university bosses are most afraid of is divestment. Some campuses agreed to hear students present divestment proposals, including Northwestern, University of Minnesota, and Harvard. Others promised to establish committees that will explore the possibility of divestment, like Evergreen State, University of California Riverside and Berkeley, and San Francisco State. Brown and Occidental have agreed to hold divestment votes.

Another demand they fear is cutting ties with Israeli universities. This was one of two demands out of ten that the Rutgers administration refused to concede. UC Riverside agreed to end its business school's exchange program with Israel — but to make it less controversial, they're cutting ties with other countries too.

Sonoma State's president Mike Lee made the boldest agreement: a full academic boycott of Israel. He was immediately put on administrative leave for insubordination then abruptly announced he was "retiring."

Some agreements made the mistake of promising not to reestablish encampments, like at the University of Washington. It is important that encampments either reject this stipulation or be prepared to break agreements that include them, because it is likely students will need to return to the encampments and other forms of disruptive protest in order to hold the universities to account.

More to win

No American university has divested their endowments from companies that fuel Israel's genocide. But the victories the encampments have won are significant and shouldn't be dismissed. Just a few years ago, it was difficult to even get a divestment vote considered on many campuses.

All successful BDS motions over the last several years are important wins. But those gains have often been confined to student associations or individual academic unions, effectively making a statement that their members support BDS and calling on their university to divest, but with no actual divestment yet taking place.

The encampment movement is building on those victories and forcing entire universities, including committees that hold the purse strings, to publicly say they will consider divestment. That the universities felt they needed to negotiate at all shows how afraid they are — as does the scale of police violence at some encampments like UCLA and Irvine.

Next steps

There's no guarantee the universities will follow through on the agreements. In fact, we can be confident they will try to worm their way out of every promise, even the weakest ones. Many students know this. As a Tweet from Brown said: "We will not let our agreement be used to pacify this movement. Rather, we will use it to fuel us further. With the strength of our collective organizing power laid bare, this deal is far from the end."

One encouraging development is the University of California's grad workers union UAW 4811's vote to strike in defense of the encampments and for disclosure and divestment. At the time of writing, only UC Santa Cruz has been called up to strike and it remains to be seen how many other campuses will be called up or how effective the strike will be. It's the end of semester, which limits how much the strike can disrupt university business as usual.

As fantastic as the encampments are, just like the Occupy Wall Street movement they're partly inspired by, occupations can only last so long and can only draw in so many people. Transforming this energy into an ongoing movement will be crucial.

UAW 4811 is practicing what students and university workers must all be prepared to do when school goes back in the fall. If lecturers refuse to teach, grad workers refuse to grade, students refuse to go to class, and support staff refuse to run the campuses, we will be in a much better position to pressure the chancellors to fully disclose and divest. This will also send a message to Biden and the Democrats as the presidential election nears. Our summer assignment is to prepare to camp out, sit in, and strike back for Palestine.