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More than 100 arrested at Washington University Palestine tent encampment, including SIUE professor Steve Tamari

Managing Editor Bruce Darnell

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Washington University Palestine Encampment



Protestors at the Musicians Memorial and Fountain

Managing Editor Bruce Darnell

A portion of the attendees at the protest hold up Palestine flags and self-made signs at the Musicians Memorial and Fountain in St. Louis on April 27.

Editor's note: The Alestle has so far been unable to get in contact with any police departments to confirm arrest. However, Steve Tamari confirmed in an April 29 email to The Alestle that he was arrested.

More than 100 protesters marched into Washington University to protest the war in Palestine and to demand action from the university. After setting up a tent encampment, campus and local police slowly broke up the protest over a few hours. Many were arrested, including SIUE History Professor Steve Tamari.

The protest officially began at 3 p.m. on April 27, at the Musicians Memorial and Fountain in St. Louis — a block away from WashU.

This protest is the second encampment attempt at WashU.

Before the protest, there was an organized art event from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. where people could paint signs in support of Palestine for use in the later march and protest.

The gathering was small at first, but soon it ballooned into a large group. There were a few counter-protestors in attendance, one of whom carried a large Israeli flag among a sea of Palestinian flags.

After 30 minutes of chanting and speaking in the park, the protestors began marching down Lagoon Drive and onto Skinker Boulevard.

Protest marshalls — a group of people meant to organize and direct the protestors — and the police blocked the roads from oncoming traffic.

The march then turned off Skinker Boulevard and went into WashU's campus. The protestors slowly made their way up a staircase and into the Brookings Quadrangle while chanting disparaging remarks about the university, such as saying they had blood on their hands.

The group arrived at the site for their first tent encampment — a section of grass outside Olin Library and in front of a statue of George Washington.

The tents were set up in a matter of minutes while people gave speeches on top of the Washington statue's concrete base. One speaker declared that the encampment would not be disbanded until their demands were met.

Their demands were for WashU to cut ties with Boeing; cut ties with Israeli educational programs; drop charges and suspensions of protestors as well as defund the campus police; give back land taken from Indigenous people; and release a statement calling for a ceasefire and condemning the genocide.

The tent encampment was entirely surrounded by supporters and onlookers.

After about half an hour, WashU Police Lieutenant Antonio Hubbard arrived and told the protestors to leave the campus or be arrested.

The encampment picked up their tents and moved back down to the entrance to WashU by Skinker Boulevard. The police followed close behind on bicycles and in a police golf cart.

After the police reached the end of the staircase to the Brookings Quad, they waited for more officers to arrive. In the meantime, the encampment was rebuilt in its second and final area for the night.

Once the police had more numbers, they advanced to a sidewalk in front of the encampment. On their approach, the protestors locked arms and held firm as they chanted in support of Palestine. The police stopped about 50 feet away from the encampment.

Hubbard warned the protestors again that if they did not leave within 10 minutes, they would be arrested. The encampment didn't budge, and the police waited and set up a barrier. After 10 minutes, the police did not move on the encampment.

One protestor named Andrew said the protest was inspirational.

"To see all these folks come out from the community — alumni, undergraduates, students — to band together and say, 'We don't want people who are building bombs that are continuing a genocide to be on campus,' I think that's really important," Andrew said.

Andrew said the protestors were ready to stay for a while. He also agreed with another protestor named Omar that the police were waiting to move in when they had greater numbers of officers.

Andrew also made note of the diversity of the group in attendance, ranging from children and faculty as well as individuals from all races. Also in attendance at the protest was Green Party politician Jill Stein.

The police eventually had enough officers to begin breaking up the encampment after about 40 minutes of waiting.

The police approached the encampment and stood at the sidewalk directly in front of it. Hubbard's fourth warning came, and he said anyone who did not leave would be placed under arrest. Then, bicycle police approached the encampment and began pulling out protestors to be arrested.

In this first wave, Steve Tamari was arrested after he got too close to a group of police arresting another protestor. He was grabbed and thrown to the ground before being dragged away from the encampment.

Stein was also arrested.

The arrests continued in waves. The police would push forward, isolate members by removing them from their arm locks, carry them away and then retreat to the sidewalk. This continued for about half an hour.

Eventually, all the tents, signs and waste were removed from the encampment. One final group of protestors remained on the ground with their arms intertwined.

Stragglers were also arrested outside of the encampment. Anyone who got too close to the police were taken into custody.

Before the final group of protestors were arrested, Hubbard stood over them and said if they stood and left they would not be arrested. The police then forced anyone remaining in the area to the public sidewalk on Skinker Boulevard.

Police vehicles drove past the sidewalk and taunted the leftover group of protestors. One driver honked the car's horn and laughed, while someone in another car yelled, "See you next week!"

An organizer for the St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee named Sarah Bannoura responded, "Yes you will!" She also said that students were carrying on the fight across the nation.

The protest resulted in nearly 100 arrests and is one of many campus protests going on across the country.

Everyone arrested at the protest was released either in a few hours or early the next morning.

An email sent by the WashU administration said all arrested would face charges of trespassing, and some may be charged with resisting arrest and assault on an officer.

However, the protest occurred during the weekend — when classes are not usually in session — and the large majority of protestors remained peaceful yet determined in their goals.

In WashU's protest policy, some of the prohibitions for demonstrations include obstructing entrance to university halls, interrupting lectures and refusing to disperse upon being told to do so by a university official.

The initial encampment did violate the campus demonstration policy. However, upon request, the protestors removed their encampment and relocated to a less disruptive spot near the road.

Non-protestors were easily able to pass through the encampment, and the only path obstruction came from the police barrier in front of the encampment. Upon approach, officers instructed people to go around.

Speakers at the protest made note that their demonstration would be peaceful, and they constantly instructed protestors to not interact with instigators and to remain within the bounds of the law.



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