

# **Reflections on the UChicago Popular University for Gaza Encampment**

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# Contents

<b>I. The Siege of Gaza</b> . . . . .	4
<b>II. Bring the War Home</b> . . . . .	7
<b>III. The View from the Lawn</b> . . . . .	10
<b>IV. Who's Afraid of Outside Agitators?</b> . . . . .	15
<b>V. Core and Periphery</b> . . . . .	18
<b>VI. A Bang and a Whimper</b> . . . . .	23
<b>VII. In The Aftermath</b> . . . . .	30
<b>VIII. Free Palestine, Free Yourself</b> . . . . .	32

The final Gaza solidarity encampment to fall in the city of Chicago was pitched on June 8<sup>th</sup> at Buckingham Fountain, directly adjacent to Lake Shore Drive and within sight of the expanse of Lake Michigan. An hour and forty minutes into a small rally, a group of participants hurriedly set up a dozen tents, established a new “encampment,” and “liberated” the fountain in the name of Gaza. Chants included: “We will protect our students.” However, the Coalition for Justice in Palestine (CJP) did not show the camp the same loyalty; after ushering a handful of over-eager arrestees out of the tents, organizers with CJP unilaterally called an end to the rally. The Chicago Police Department (CPD) followed on its heels to confiscate and discard the tents once the camp had voluntarily disbanded. The fountain was “liberated” for a few hours at most. The tents, left-over from other encampments, which CJP had refused to donate to unhoused Chicagoans because they belonged to the organization, were instead gifted to the CPD—who did not appear to appreciate the gift.

This bizarre conclusion to a semester of campus occupations is how exactly *half* of those who planned the University of Chicago Gaza Solidarity Encampment hoped events would conclude on *their* quad. These student activists, who made up a vocal reformist bloc within the so-called “Core” of UCUP (University of Chicago United for Palestine), promised to stay until the school divested from Israel. For many of them, it was a bare-faced lie; they planned to return to their dorms and apartments after the camp’s second night. This faction subtly campaigned *against* keeping the encampment going for its entire existence and consistently wore down efforts to make it a genuine occupation.

They were, however, a numerical minority. Many students heard their cynical words and took them literally, as the promise to *stay until divestment* became the bottom line for the encampment’s radical edge. The tensions that emerged between *the phrase and its content*, as Core’s internal unity and external control of the camp’s affairs broke down, helped us find our place among the various blocs of the campus-based Palestine movement. We hope an inventory of these experiences may point to possible ways forward now that the season of encampments has ended.

The document you are reading is the direct collaboration of eleven participants in the encampment and draws upon insights and recollections from a larger body of comrades. While we use an authorial “we” to outline points of consensus, the authors are an eclectic group of UChicago students, workers, and unaffiliated community members. Some of us have extensive movement activity, including Palestine solidarity, labor organizing, and campus politics, and others experienced the encampment as their first wave of struggle. Many of us did not know each other before the encampment, and we are not members of any revolutionary organization. Despite our different backgrounds and varying relationships with the university, we came together around a shared practical sensibility, steered by the notion that the Palestine solidarity movement in Chicago, and more broadly, the essentially connected movement to end capitalism, must do better, and develop tactics and strategies adequate to these righteous aims.

We believe that the university encampment movement in the United States is a significant political development that will, for better or worse, determine the immediate future of the Palestine solidarity movement and also help set the stage for the next wave of mass struggle on a more generalized scale—the likes of which we saw in 2020 and will surely see again before long. It is thus essential to map its contours and contradictions. In our narrative analysis, we hope to establish a definitive documentation of how the UChicago encampment went down, with the broader intention of opening up an array of tactical and strategic questions for readers in Chicago and

beyond. We offer a story that is at once likely to be familiar to those who have participated in pro-Palestine encampments and simultaneously quite at odds with the official version of events offered by the more reformist organizations active in them. While certain aspects of the story are unique to their setting, most of what we have included is generalizable to pressing questions around how incipient mass movements understand themselves, organize, unfold, and die. Within the context of UChicago, we hope what follows will serve as a kind of cautionary tale. The movement must do better in the future, and we would not have taken the considerable time to collectively author what follows if we did not believe it was possible.

While we do not have a directly programmatic solution for the present political morass, we share a common understanding that the only effective movement to free Palestine must simultaneously entail the revolutionary transformation of the United States and all capitalist societies, on which the barbarism of Zionism and other forms of life-denying oppression rest. This understanding does not mean deferring the end of the occupation until the proverbial “after the revolution,” but instead, practically linking the fate of Palestinians with the victims of capitalism on a global scale as a means of orienting political activity on the local level, in the here and now. While overthrowing a superpower like the United States and the attendant collapse of the capitalist mode of production might seem impossibly far-fetched, such abrupt historical transformations have almost always seemed that way until the day they didn’t. In any case, this is not a thought experiment; the struggle is already underway.

## **I. The Siege of Gaza**

In 2024, the Zionist state has occupied the land of Palestine for seventy-five years. For three generations, the regime and its armed men have subjected Palestinians living in this reservation-turned-killing zone to deprivation, humiliation, and genocide. But the blame falls on the Zionist entity only as much as it falls on its friends, those pioneers of population management: the last centuries’ colonial empires and their descendants, the developed capitalist states. Once eager to support the creation of a “national home for the Jewish people” somewhere, anywhere but here, these states now constitute the Zionist regime’s most earnest and ardent supporters, seeing it as a crucial partner and foothold in a crisis-ridden region, at various moments the bulwark against communism, Arab nationalism, and political Islam. The history of the Palestinian occupation is a global story, implicating the great powers of the world; so, too, must its liberation be the business of every person fighting for freedom worldwide.

The present historical moment began in the late twentieth century, with powerful nations and increasingly transnational capitalists realizing that the world system sustained until the sixties and seventies could not continue. Profit rates dwindled, and state counter-offensives against radical labor and liberation movements triumphed domestically. Capital then set its sights abroad, as industrial manufacturing in the core gave way to a bloated service sector and ejected swathes of (racialized) proletarians from regular access to employment and pay. Simultaneously, colonies and dependent client states won their “independence” from their metropolises, only to be re-integrated into global circuits of capital by the same imperial firms fleeing their domestic labor markets, backed by an international order capable of forcing newly independent states into predatory “structural adjustment” policies, responding with extra-economic force where this proved unsuccessful. This new round of primitive accumulation engendered perpetual instability

in many so-called underdeveloped nations as a paramount condition of their participation in the world market. To make matters worse, the drive to compete has accelerated the destruction of a massive range of the planet's plant and animal life and rendered human habitation in these same areas increasingly dangerous—for their inhabitants and the rest of humanity, as the four-year pandemic has demonstrated.

We face today a combined but unequally developed global crisis at the hands of a transnational capitalist class whose “ruling bloc” is politically disorganized, incapable of or unwilling to pursue long-term planning, and ready instead to white-knuckle whatever crises are necessary to shore up its persistence, at the expense of the populations it holds apart from regular employment (hereafter “surplus” to labor). Avenues of resistance—labor unions, old socialist parties—that once served as counterweights to the capitalist order have been integrated into it. Likewise, the external differentiations that once characterized global politics have fallen to the wayside as part of an international consensus to safeguard new accumulation schemes and protect the system from its final collapse. Unlike the left, which is disoriented and dislodged from the old institutions and conditions of struggle that gave the old workers' movement shape, the world's leaders find relative unity in the willingness, among a handful of competing blocs, to deploy the same technologies of surveillance, incarceration, internal and external policing, and war to bolster their territorial claims and the interests of their more prominent individual capitals.

Occupied Palestine is one laboratory among many for maintaining affluence amid this sustained crisis. Following the 1997 establishment of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, capital in the Middle East has consolidated—as seen in the 2020 Abraham Accords normalizing relations with the UAE and Bahrain—and been integrated into global circuits. The Zionist entity is also on the receiving end of large flows of migrants from Africa and East, South, and Southeast Asia, drawn on to implement its projects. Notably, the majority of Palestinians in Gaza have not been permitted entry to work since 1993, when the Zionist state sealed Gaza's borders following the first Intifada. During the decades following, the regime began “To reorganize labor markets and to recruit transient labor forces that are disenfranchised and easy to control.” In particular, migrant laborers replaced Palestinian surplus-proletarians as a flexible and cheap labor market input, rendering the present genocide economically feasible in light of the global integration of border regimes and increasingly transnational labor markets.

Globally, migration rates have skyrocketed as those who can escape for more stable and temperate zones with more capital and competitive labor markets do so. These migrants are at once shut out and drawn upon as needed to implement what the managerial middle class has determined is necessary to maintain bourgeois consumption standards; they serve as floating labor reserves for increasingly predatory individual capitals. From the American Southwest to Australia, core states have accomplished in their border enforcement what was once only achievable through apartheid. Likewise, migrant laborers in Israel “do not need to be subjected to the apartheid system imposed on Palestinians because their temporary migrant status achieves their social control and disenfranchisement more effectively, and of course because they are not demanding the return of occupied lands and do not have a political claim to a state.” This ejection from access to labor markets leaves the Palestinian people not as a traditional surplus population, leveraged to keep the price of labor cheap, but as surplus *humanity*, split off from the cycle of capital accumulation that binds Israel to the rest of the world system. On this point, the imperatives of international capitals and the Israeli settler state happen to agree—though it would make little sense to imagine the genocide in Gaza as driven by purely economic motives.

Fueled instead by a combination of economic imperatives and deranged ethno-religious fundamentalism, the genocide is a war of annihilation that attempts to empty Gaza of native inhabitants by a combination of maximal mass murder and minimal forced ejection, after which the entity will convert the land into space—“a parking lot,” in the words of some American officials—imagined by some as the future site of an Edenic paradise. But it is not clear whether these fantasies of resettlement will outlive their ideological shelf-life: attempts by settler factions to enter the north of Gaza during the opening of the genocide were not enthusiastically endorsed by the state, for example; at any rate, the wholesale destruction and ecological devastation wrought by the military invasion will render any future resettlement in many places difficult if not impossible. To our understanding, 2005’s “disengagement” and the shift to Gaza’s Bantustan-like status sidelined settlement aims in Gaza. The presumption that the settlement-driven wing of Israeli civil society and the annihilationist techniques of the Zionist military are in agreement on the long-term goals of the genocide assumes that an ideological agreement among parties suffices for a shared strategic vision of the settler state’s future. We should not underestimate the political and cultural divisions that may lead the so-called Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) into a blind alley.

In occupied Palestine, then, we see a grim vision of the future: an increasingly ecologically endangered racial regime with a fascistic white population clinging to its consumption standards with a controlled rate of migration from racialized external populations. Some laborers are stuck at the border, while some are permitted entry conditional on their below-market-average employment and often backed into unthinkable labor conditions by their employment-conditional visas. An internally immobilized, racialized population converted from labor surplus to mere obstacle—now facing genocide as punishment for a refusal to be penned in and killed at will. Economic forces alone do not explain the zeal with which Israelis are liquidating their neighbors; the murderous, settler-colonial ideology of Zionism provides a visceral and emotionally charged political identity through which the aggressors in a century-long genocide, armed and supported by the most powerful nations in the world, may view themselves as underdogs and victims as they mete out the very atrocities they accuse their victims of perpetrating.

After decades of repression and slaughter, what remains of revolutionary resistance in Palestine? Since October 7<sup>th</sup>, Fatah, the largest group within the Palestine Liberation Organization, has remained silent, as its goal of peaceful compromise with America and the Zionist state has failed. The Marxist-Leninist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), historically the voice of the Palestinian revolutionary left, declined in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and, more importantly, since Israel split off Gaza from anything approaching a labor market integrated into its national economy. In the gaps left where historically secular nationalists and communists stood, Islamic resistance groups like Hamas have surged in popularity. Like Fatah, Hamas has always been a free-market, nationalist, capitalist party: it raises its funds through heavy taxation, and its wealth lies in investment portfolios held primarily in Turkey and the Gulf states. It has risen to power as the floor fell out from under the conditions that supported the old vehicles for struggle and as every other path of resistance has been met with extreme repression. It is not, however, the only participant in Palestine’s armed struggle—October 7<sup>th</sup>’s Al-Aqsa Flood was planned and executed by a coalition of armed organizations, and subsequent demands by spokespeople of the Palestinian resistance demanded the freedom of non-Hamas political leaders as well as Hamas affiliates.

Last January, the *New York War Crimes* ran a fascinating piece exploring “The Black Liberation Movement and the Struggle for Palestine.” The paper translated a statement by Abu Ghassan,

the imprisoned Secretary-General of the PFLP, which proclaimed “[f]rom inside the occupier’s Ramon prison” that from “Ansar to Attica to Lannemezan, the prison is not only a political space of confinement but a site of struggle.” Throughout the wave of encampments, these functional ties between American and Israeli police and prisons have been emphasized rhetorically by many activists. However, the issue’s politicization has often stalled in identifying a common enemy instead of entering into the conditions of struggle that unite and separate Gaza from places like the South Side of Chicago.

The lessons we might learn from the Palestinian resistance require translation into our domestic conditions. For instance, while Palestinians have been severed from Israeli labor markets nearly entirely, the continued yet precarious employment of Black proletarians on Chicago’s South Side, while they are at the same time managed, killed, and caged, indicates their fragile relevance to domestic individual capitals outside of the prisons has not yet run out. In an increasingly interconnected world, the same system metes out death and devastation to these geographically separate populations. It will only be through common struggle across these and many other lines of globalized class stratification that we can decisively defeat capitalism. Resistance is everywhere, and this resistance must be generalized, clarifying in the process its enemy and the “we” who oppose it.

In America, as in Palestine, struggle is defined by the contradictory character of the people and groups who make it. The political limits of our times are the limits of the class fractions who command and system-level restructurings that define the terrain for the movements we enter into—in Palestine, the decline of the revolutionary left and the rise of liberal-religious armed struggle factions following the Zionist state’s slide into crisis-ridden restructuring. In America, similar economic transformations deformed rebels into a new category: the activist. In the 1990s, following the twilight of the workers’ movement and whatever had existed of a revolutionary left, people adopted a model of political struggle to match the time: the corporate campaign, in which depoliticized participants accidentally united around short-term tactical questions related to fighting an individual corporate entity, absent a broader transformative vision. Most famously, environmental activists around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century adopted this model, and it has more spectacularly re-emerged with Palestine Action’s sabotage campaigns against Elbit and the PYM’s #maskoffMaersk campaign. Its foundational assumptions also define the basic organizational unit of the campaign for the boycott of, divestment from, and sanctions on the state of Israel. Piecing together the mark of this organizational form on ‘campus activism’ will help clarify the limits and potentials of the campus-based struggle for Palestine.

## **II. Bring the War Home**

While the U.S. wing of the movement opposing the colonization of Palestine predates the state of Israel itself, it suffered a lull after the defeat of its proponents in the Black Power movement during the 1970s. Flurries of activity briefly punctuated this overall decline in action and consciousness in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle in 1982 in opposition to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, in 1993 following the betrayal of the First Intifada through the Oslo Accords. In the early 2000s, when the anti-war movement in the U.S. connected with the Second Intifada in Palestine, this movement experienced a wave of new organizing that would prove more durable than previous iterations—particularly on college campuses.

In 2002, the previously marginal Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), founded in 1993, saw an explosion in its membership, spreading to campuses across the U.S. SJP inherited from the 1990s a strongly decentralized structure designed to allow for political work among a deeply politically divided constituency (analyses of the state of Israel as a settler-colonial apartheid state, or of the two-state solution as a dead-letter cover for worsening settlement of the West Bank, were still hotly contested within the movement at that point). This largely uncoordinated but ultra-visible activity of Palestinians and anti-Zionists on campus had provoked a reaction from Zionist politicians and funders: students founded several new Hasbarist organizations with explicitly campus-focused missions in response to pro-Palestine student groups. Building on this work, the David Project waged a ruthless fight against anti-Zionist scholars starting at Columbia University in 2004. On the other side, in 2005, a coalition of Palestinian trade unions and civil society organizations released the call to Boycott, Sanction, and Divest from those responsible for the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestine, providing the fledgling student movement with a unity of purpose which persists in the movement today. Within a few years, campuses had become the central battlegrounds in the ideological fight over Zionism and Palestinian self-determination in U.S. civil society.

SJP's influence, and that of the BDS Movement, only grew in successive years as Israeli politics lurched to the right, producing multiple new offensives on Gaza. Since the start of the Second Intifada, no student has completed a 4-year course of study without a significant incursion by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) into Palestinian territory and an accompanying massacre of Palestinian civilians. In this context, BDS has proven remarkably effective at shifting popular consciousness around the Palestinian struggle and laying the groundwork for the current outpouring of anti-Zionist resistance. This conjuncture has produced an overwhelming political shift, particularly on campuses, where large majorities of constituents were young enough not to have been politicized during an earlier period of hardened pro-Israel hegemony, with more obvious localized stakes, targets, and demands of the struggle for Palestine.

Meanwhile, the past decade of campus activism has proven inseparable from the growing realization within American civil society that its history, culture, and state are bound up in a white supremacist labor regime that condemns whole strata of its population to unyielding misery. Student critics of their client universities are increasingly encouraged to articulate their grievances in the theoretical registers of settler colonial studies and the Black radical tradition. It is thus unsurprising that the movement of the encampments captured the imagination of the U.S. left and saw some of the most militant, most advanced confrontations with the state since the 2020 George Floyd Uprising emerged on college campuses. It is no accident, moreover, that this most recent wave of struggle was born at Columbia University—the site of the David Project's first anti-tenure campaign and the hotspot of the anti-Zionist struggle for a generation—or that it has begun to articulate its aims in continuity with domestic struggles against the police. The campaign for boycott, divestment, and sanctions has gradually migrated outside the university with its graduates: those industrial sectors most impacted by pro-Palestine labor organizing since the start of the current genocide in Gaza—education (pre-K-12 and higher ed), healthcare, and tech—are comprised of college grads, many of whom were themselves involved in Palestine organizing.

As significant as these advances in popular sentiment have been, we should retain a sense of perspective: After nearly two decades of campaigning for divestment at campuses across the country, only a few minor holdings have divested, and the explicit political horizons of the movement have remained narrow, hemmed to the BNC's nonviolent pressure campaign. The move-



ment's life beyond its campus-based origins has been confined to the sectors of the middle class that its college-educated participants left their universities to populate. Repression of the pro-Palestine student movement and its allies has only worsened. And at the level of the state, a seismic shift in popular consciousness finds politics today with a tiny minority of milquetoast liberals—the likes of which populated the U.S. Congress in scores during the 1970s—while a bipartisan Zionist coalition has pushed forward increasingly more draconian measures at all levels of government aimed at defanging the BDS Movement's push for university divestment before it can score a single sizable win.

These measured successes bear the marks of their origin in a similarly-circumscribed political scene: campus activism, which, aside from being undercut by the routine churn of participants as classes graduate and non-tenured professors face reprisals for involvement, fosters a characteristically managerial political environment. Many of the drawbacks of the traditional "SHAC model" pressure campaign apply even more emphatically on campus. Participants exert only consumer-side leverage over their opponents; organizers understand themselves in their capacity as students and formulate their political commitments relative to visible university administrators, not even the ruling boards of trustees; political education tends to stall out at holding the university's actions up to its supposed values as if the demonstration of a contradiction between the two is itself a victory; most importantly, a persistent gap separates a bloc of organizers who plan to merge their "student activism" with careers to come, and the organizers whose political horizons exceed their future job applications. Such a gap flows from the location of universities in the reproduction of capital and American culture: students pay (or are paid for by the institution) to invest their post-graduation labor power with specialized skills and accolades that will grant them a seat in an unstable middle-class, with one foot on either side of the capital relation. Far from pushing students to undermine their class position, this—combined with the precarious situation of the sectors of the middle class into which they'd like to enter—tends to silo them off from recognition of their impending proletarianization.

This unstable combination turns student organizing into one of many sites at which a new proletarian self-understanding might emerge as downwardly mobile university attendees stumble into confrontations with the state and capital, both anxious to shore themselves up as the present crisis deepens. But this requires *de-exceptionalizing* any student activist campaign, removing it from its elite trappings, and attempting to bridge campus politics with other struggles in the surrounding area, if not the world. For instance, a chant in our movement notes that police are "Israeli trained"; many involved in the struggle for Palestine point to university backlash to demands for divestment as proof that the movement winning its current demands would fundamentally destabilize the existing order, itself imagined to be ideologically Zionist. This conception is false—and frankly, whether administrators care one way or another about the state of Israel has nothing to do with the uniformity of their responses to divestment campaigns. But a movement that underscores the complicity of American civil society institutions in the genocide in Palestine pulls on a loose thread that *could* exhibit, if followed, the inseparability of all of our struggles.

An inventory of any given university portfolio—and a full explanation of why American police train alongside their Israeli, Chinese, or Indian counterparts—would offer student activists a cross-section of a world system in which international architectures of state repression protect a transnational capitalist class that is increasingly conscious of its short-term necessities, all of which will prove incompatible with the life of the world's poor. To date, American labor has not

risen to the May Day demands of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions: an end to American manufacture and transport of weapons to Israel, reflected in trade union policy; a material campaign against companies participating in Israel's genocide in Gaza, and a complementary campaign aimed at the United States government. The radical edges of disparate social movements and trade union campaigns have attempted to meet this practical minimum.

Last month, radical rank-and-file in the University of California schools publicly broke with the pressure-campaign political horizons of their UAW local, attempting to push beyond trade union consciousness and legally circumscribed tactics:

Rank and file union members have demanded elected UAW leadership... follow through with concrete action, and leadership has ignored this call to action. To this point, the Rank and File collective is calling for [...] the collective withholding of labor in support of Palestinian liberation. We are not interested in the dictates and boundaries of the ULP strike, as we challenge its basic premises and assumptions... [W]e see it as a moment [to] begin to effect a substantial material impact against both the Zionist settler-colonial entity and the Amerikan racial capitalist-imperialist state.

Consternation from those willing to tail the social-chauvinist majority in the trade unions misses the trend embodied by this unlikely statement: the UCI radical Rank and File's expansion of the political horizons of the Palestine movement to include confrontation with the American state is part of a broader escalation of the strategic stakes of the movement itself. Throughout the country, counter-info sites and communiqués supply a growing list of autonomous actions that have materially subverted occupation, domestic or Zionist. The NYC-based organization Within Our Lifetime (WOL) has likewise begun to tie the liberation of Palestine to domestic struggles against Cop City, from Atlanta to New York and beyond. WOL has taken shape alongside Columbia's deeply politicized and dedicated SJP chapter, which has remained a north star of the movement since proving its heroism in the Columbia occupation. In the year to come, these true leaders of the Palestine solidarity movement have the opportunity to facilitate increasingly interconnected, experimental struggles against the white supremacist ruling bloc of global capital. And those of us in Chicago and cities like it, where the movement has been demobilized and reduced to perfunctory marches and symbolic acts of speaking truth to power, must take note.

### **III. The View from the Lawn**

Following the Al-Aqsa Flood and Israel's immediate ground invasion and bombing campaign of Gaza, political action surged globally, as both Zionist and pro-Palestine crowds mobilized to demonstrate in streets and squares around the world. Specifically in the United States, while organizations held demonstrations in most large cities, the movement gained notable momentum on several university campuses, initially at major private universities like Harvard, NYU, and Columbia. In the months to follow, a sustained campaign of doxxing began against pro-Palestine student activists from Zionist groups like Canary Mission and the vaguely titled Accuracy in Media, tarring them as antisemites and calling for firings, as well as investigations into antisemitism on college campuses by the schools, the FBI, and the US Department of Education as violations

of the Civil Rights Act; investigators began looking into Islamophobia on campuses on the same basis.

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, students at Columbia University placed about seventy tents on a campus lawn, claiming the space as a “Gaza Solidarity Encampment.” Despite being cleared quickly, the practice caught on at campuses across the country, with students at over 130 campuses creating encampments since. Currently, these have all been voluntarily dismantled or dismantled by the cops, with varying degrees of police violence at each; the photographs and videos taken of cops at Ohio State University, Indiana University, Emory, Columbia, and UCLA, to name a few, speak for themselves.

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, Chicagoland had its first encampment at Northwestern University in Evanston. Excluding one initial confrontation with the police, the camp was incredibly peaceful and inoffensive. It ended in capitulation after five days, with the university granting some symbolic victories in return for an end to what minimal nuisance the camp presented. By the time Northwestern’s encampment had ended, the University of Chicago’s had begun, and one formed at DePaul University shortly after. DePaul’s encampment lasted the longest in Chicagoland, going a little over two weeks until the Chicago Police Department raided it; we hope participants from these camps are taking similar stock of what specifically went down at each.

Organizers originally slated the University of Chicago Popular University for Gaza for the morning of May 1<sup>st</sup> on the university’s Main Quad. This relatively late date was in line with the national SJP network’s “Popular University for Gaza” campaign, which had pointed to May Day and graduation days as specific dates for calls to action when national SJP first launched it on Sunday, April 21. But given the urgency of the moment, the very announcement of this campaign became the green light for encampments and occupations, with the specifics of timing left to the judgment of local organizers. Unprepared for immediate deployment, our plans grew around the May Day launch more than a week away, as we saw each day more images of dramatic scenes coming out of the campuses that were quicker on the draw.

Our campus coalition, UChicago United for Palestine (UCUP), elaborated plans for the encampment throughout several drawn-out meetings. As an umbrella of several student activist organizations, UCUP comprises such a diverse cross-section of the conscientious part of the student body that it defies neat description. At the same time, the initiative and tempo of the coalition and its constituent groups are firmly in the hands of a relatively small number of student organizers operating in a readily identifiable way. When a clear encampment leadership body called Core eventually emerged, this small but effective cohort of political moderates would take control of representing the encampment publicly and eventually succeed in pushing their rivals away from decision-making.

This moderate bloc consisted of budding career activists and social movement managers who were “incubated” by the professionals of long-standing networks of activism-oriented NGOs, philanthropic foundations, and other liberal advocacy organizations that double as tax shelters for the ultra-rich and work assiduously to marginalize revolutionary challenges to capital and the state. It seems a large part of such “organizer training” is how to take power and hold onto it for reformist ends, even in settings that pretend to practice direct democracy. We will call this element of Core “the careerists” to distinguish them from the radicals who participated in Core, who we came to respect and admire, and who were unfortunately marginalized.

If asked to define themselves, the careerists would likely start by placing themselves in a long tradition of student activists on campus and in the wider Hyde Park area who have worked to

advocate and raise awareness for unjust university practices and priorities. While this tradition certainly includes political radicals, particularly the cohort that went through the George Floyd Rebellion, the turnover rate inherent to the university keeps this tradition generally abstract beyond the immediate people one meets, with its actual upper limit being those students about to graduate when one first arrives. This lack of concrete tradition creates a sustainability problem, as the institutional depth required to maintain the organizational capacity to consistently act politically radically depends on the current cohort's backgrounds and lives outside the group more than it would otherwise. Thus, when most of the cohort is timid or just going through the motions, it is an easy justification for external professional nonprofiteers to step in as mentors and shape them in the image of their abstract activist ideal. While the more conscious careerists may abstractly identify one way, many of their concrete traditions primarily exist off campus.

While we met individuals within the central decision-making body with intelligent and courageous analyses and proposals, the moderates outmaneuvered them in lengthy bureaucratic meetings. In response, the frustrated radicals defected from the central leadership in the ones and twos, skipping general assemblies and backing away from the camp. Others volunteered for necessary functions like kitchen work, and this division of reproductive labor removed many voices from participation in decisions. In a crucial missed opportunity, we and other radicals never formed a coherent opposition bloc or fought to marginalize the emergent inexperienced leaders disinterested in keeping the camp going.

The careerists, often as meeting facilitators, successfully framed discussions of the planned encampment around the dominant theme of "safety." They schematized this according to three color-coded roles: Red, Yellow, and Green, which campers initially understood to mean levels of risk of arrest, with red roles facing high risk, green (entirely off-site) facing none, and yellow somewhere in between. Going over these roles took up the lion's share of discussion in general camp-planning meetings. This dominance is partially because independent working groups coordinated plans for other practical concerns such as food, supplies, care, security, and the zero-hour deployment plan. But in hindsight, the seeds of dividing the camp with the ideology of "safety" and marginalizing those who sought to build a threatening occupation were in place from the beginning.

Nonetheless, this would have been difficult. The encampments represented an act of commoning, building shared spaces for living, thinking, and experimenting with politics together. The history of capitalist modernity is the history of commons being violently erased from the earth—including, as scholar Peter Linebaugh has argued, in the current genocide in Palestine—and replaced with societies where the bounty of the Earth and the life that populates it, have value only insofar as individual people, whose hoarding and laying waste to life is the foremost expression of their individual "right," can buy, sell, pollute, and ultimately destroy it. Most of us trace our political awakening to moments of collective political action when the self-defeating egoism and alienation of capitalist society temporarily break down. A new sense of the possible is opened up by the bold and decisive actions taken by hitherto anonymous people, opening the possibility for new values and ways of living. In recent years, the formation of commons as a response to austerity and social crisis, no matter how fraught in practice, has revealed a deep need for community and belonging in a world hostile to it. The challenge facing those who related to the camp as an instrument to manipulate toward cynical ends lay in the powerful collective energy that emerges when masses of people experience that another world is viscerally possible.

As highly publicized occupations and confrontations unfolded across several campuses during that last week of April, the sense among us that our coalition was unduly hesitating generated some anxiety. However, the highly siloed planning process meant that the original launch date had considerable inertia behind it. It was only due to a mole that plans changed. On April 24, one week before the original launch, leaks from the main encampment Signal chat were published by the *Chicago Thinker*, a right-wing student newspaper. As many participants in the chat had also been using their real names, panic broke. Participants nuked the chat, and a more trusted core built a replacement and moved the launch date to Monday, April 29.

*Monday.* The launch of the encampment met no snarls. About two dozen of us, tents in our bags, were to mill around casually on the Main Quad and wait for the signal: campers carrying the large apartheid walls from an earlier SJP art installation in from the street. Then those of us with tents would set them up all at once, while everyone else in the vicinity would be on hand to get between the tent-builders and any interference. All of this happened according to plan and without any confrontation. Though acting quickly on a well-coordinated and instantaneous signal was certainly an advantageous move, it was likely the leak of the original launch date and our change of plans that misdirected the campus police: the *Hyde Park Herald* later quoted a UCPD lieutenant saying: “We weren’t expecting this until Wednesday.”

Within a few hours, the encampment expanded to cover much of the western half of the Main Quad. Most of its footprint consisted of sleeping tents, initially arranged haphazardly. The food tent was centrally located next to the central walkway, blocked off at both ends by the apartheid walls. Meetings and prayer occurred in an open space near the food tent. On the southern edge of the camp was a welcome canopy, a medic tent, various supplies tents, and an art build area. A short fence separated the camp from the central Quad walkway, soon adorned with art from collective “art builds,” where campers painted items of camp defense like perimeter barricades in a festive environment. Two autonomous zine distro tables had quickly sprung up in a central area and distributed mostly insurrectionary anarchist zines and stickers, including an impressive collection of first-hand accounts and strategic reflections on unfolding encampments across the US. Campers also set up a lending library of mostly Palestine-related books in the same area.

The presence of such unapologetic revolutionary literature in a central location caused some consternation among leaders of the encampment. It did not help that the distro-ing anarchists arrived and remained in full black bloc attire that readily marked them as radical outsiders. In the end, they dissuaded the concerned organizers from making any intervention as long as the distros were clearly labeled as “autonomous” so as not to be misapprehended as the authorized voice of the camp. They remained in their central location and were the only people distributing literature throughout the encampment, apart from the occasional wayward Spartacist or stalwart disciple of Bob Avakian. UCUP had planned several days of programming, which went ahead according to schedule. These events included guest speakers: Bill Ayers of the book *Fugitive Days*, local DSA Alderman Byron Sigcho-Lopez, and speakers from Jisoor, the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, and the South Shore community organization Not Me, We, alongside teach-ins, workshops, group discussions, and musical performances.

However, after several days had come and gone and the pre-planned programming had been exhausted, the opportunities for political education increasingly became spontaneous and perfunctory. Some events amounted to little more than a ritual for speakers to talk to a crowd. As for the teach-ins—whose topics ranged from Medical Apartheid in Palestine and Jewish Anti-Zionism to the 1968 DNC Protests and the Occupy Movement—only time will tell if they were

effective in reaching new audiences. The ad-hoc nature of their organization, especially as time went on, was a casualty of the unsustainable system of feminized reproductive labor in the camp and contributed to a missed opportunity for a coordinated political education strategy aimed at broadening support for the movement among the curious students and community members wandering through the camp.

The general assembly proved the most available check on the careerists' rhetoric and power. Typically held twice daily, the general assemblies presented themselves as important decision-making bodies for sundry practical matters surrounding the encampment, especially the impending threat of attack and eviction. These were the main touchstones of the collectively organized life of the camp, where we had the opportunity to voice our opinions, hear each other's thoughts and concerns, and offer proposals regarding the encampment and its direction. They were also where the student negotiators presented their updates on the negotiation process with the UChicago administration. Facilitators invited attendees to brainstorm strategies and tactics and provoked interesting political debates.

However, these meetings were primarily facilitated by the careerists and those they trusted. Their orientation and mode of thinking were most often along the lines of liberal professional activism. Despite the appearance of deliberation, we noticed immediately that these careerists considered the assemblies to be transmission belts for decisions they had already made behind closed doors earlier in the day. When attendees took the assembly seriously and presented alternative political visions, the careerists met them with jeering hostility, shopworn privilege baiting, and whispers of "outside agitators," "horizontalists," and "anarchists," which were sadly enough amplified, we learned, by purportedly supportive faculty members on the UChicago Faculty for Justice in Palestine listserv. The extent of these faculty members' roles in limiting democracy within the encampment is a story that largely remains to be told.

The general assembly form, of course, lends itself to inaction. As challenges mounted, the careerists effectively ran out the clock each day. Nonetheless, the problem remained that they were increasingly out of step with those in the camp who took the encampment's goals seriously, namely that *we wouldn't leave until divestment*. As members of Core began to break ranks, we learned that roughly half of them never wanted the encampment. Encampments on other campuses had effectively forced them to take action lest they appear insufficiently dedicated to the cause. Once the tents went up, they immediately began plotting a dignified exit. But as the encampment wore on, an increasing mass of its rank-and-filers took this rhetoric seriously and planned to defend the camp against eviction and escalate the action toward winning its stated goals. Thus, as a powerful bloc within the encampment's self-proclaimed leadership quietly advocated for its demise, a growing number of us made the facade of a pro-Palestine encampment into a reality.

*Tuesday.* The camp continued to grow, with students and community members arriving to spend time there, whether just for the day or to sleep overnight. More politicians came, and more faith leaders preached and led services. The camp remained on the western half of the quad but expanded unevenly. Rectangular pieces of plywood appeared that were enthusiastically painted and assembled into shields.

Core called a morning general assembly, asked campers to sort themselves into "high" and "low" risk roles, and then separated people into separate meetings. Core facilitators began by asking the high-risk roles *on the camp's first full day* what concessions would be sufficient for them to go home. Many of us echoed different aspects of the "Disclose, Divest, Repair" demands released

when the encampment first went up, indicating our unwillingness to leave without achieving at least one of these demands. In response, the student leaders said they would stay until divestment and disclosure. Many of the rank-and-file members of the encampment, ourselves included, took them at face value and echoed their willingness to fight until the end. One point of agreement between our two separated groups was that we wished to avoid at all costs the weak compromise that led the encampment at Northwestern University to self-destruct.

After this meeting, some campers moved the large walls from the middle of the walkway to a more obstructive position until they were stopped by appointed “marshals” and moderates within the leadership. At that point, they had already done the deed and moved the barriers. This pattern continued to play out throughout the encampment: a minor “escalation” (if one could even call it that, considering the kind of tactics displayed on other campuses) would occur, be stopped, then it would have already happened to enough of a degree that they could not take it back. A few careerists also wasted time condemning acts that had occurred overnight, from graffiti calling on the encampment to “Escalate for Gaza!” spray painted on buildings to the ripping down of a string of Israeli flags, which led to the individuals allegedly involved being harassed both by cops *and* camp marshals. There was a consistent knee-jerk response among a small cohort of self-styled leaders to throw anyone to the left of them out to dry as a gesture toward the UChicago administration that they were the “good protesters” who they could trust with a seat at the table.

Meanwhile, the camp marshals, who were technically there to keep campers safe from cops, Zionists, and other creeps, proved to be less interested in protecting the camp—as seen in their inability to stop arrests or intervene in real moments of conflict between the encampment and UCPD or Zionists—and more about mandating “acceptable” forms of protest within the camp. Their supposed authority also confused the camp: when people spotted a marshal running somewhere, people followed them, assuming support was needed, only to find the marshals concerned with scolding another unapproved “escalation.”

After nightfall on Tuesday, the large camp speakers that had played music for a *dabke* teach-in only moments before were switched to WKCR 89.9, Columbia University’s student radio station. The cheerful afterglow from the *dabke* lesson quickly subsided as we gathered around to listen to WKCR’s live reportage of the brutal police raid on the Columbia protestors occupying Hind’s Hall. The wave of student encampments began with Columbia, and as we glimpsed images on Twitter of the enormous BearCat the NYPD used to break through the hall’s second-floor windows, the bravery of the Columbia protestors was both a call to action as well as an example of the forces of the state arrayed against the encampments. Chronicling the difficulty of the UChicago encampment in answering that call—with all the attempts and fitful starts—is one of the reasons we decided to write this.

#### **IV. Who’s Afraid of Outside Agitators?**

A crucial attribute of the UChicago encampment’s tepid answer to the call of history is the lack of support or involvement from the Hyde Park/South Side community. In these early days, the encampment was established and maintained thanks to the courage and determination of many, including a plurality with no formal affiliation with the University of Chicago. The camp’s food and supplies came from a network of community members, many with no UChicago affiliation. Core put out calls for as many people as possible to travel to the camp and put their bodies on the

line when the encampment was threatened by fascists or cops, regardless of their connection to the school. The crowd cheered as speakers at rallies celebrated the diversity of the encampment and the necessity of community beyond UChicago joining in the struggle. Although these organizers, in line with others across the country, professed a desire to break down the boundaries between students and community members, several incidents demonstrated their inability and unwillingness to protect non-students.

Beginning on Tuesday, UCPD arrested, detained, or otherwise harassed community members and students, as cops targeted them while they were leaving the immediate circle of the camp and picked them off, either on the perimeter of the quad or while passing through campus elsewhere. The lack of a culture of de-arrest and lingering deference to cops meant that though the organizers of the camp professed the desire to erase the boundaries between campus and community, the burden of police violence was still felt most heavily by Black community members.

Moreover, while UCUP made some overtures to activists and organizations on the South Side for their participation in the encampment, it did not unite the struggle for Palestine with their struggles once they arrived. The opposite occurred: university police harassed them, camp leaders snubbed them, participants shied away from them, and they went home with the correct impression that this movement wanted nothing to do with theirs. At this moment, a gap between the encampment as a cultural space (an exciting time to sleep on the lawn and defy administrators) and the camp as a political project (a struggle in solidarity with the world's poor) widened.

The same myopia that prevented these student activists from making the necessary connections between the struggle in Gaza and the war at home would culminate in a fatal obsession with the unnamed, unseen, yet all-knowing and manipulative *outside agitator*. Used interchangeably with “anarchist,” it became a liberal synonym for “mean person who disagrees with me,” as we saw it indiscriminately applied to UChicago students and community supporters alike. With the apparent support of UChicago faculty, careerists consistently deployed this curse against those who disagreed with the careerists, including those who simply demanded democratic decision-making at the encampment. It is, of course, a dirty political trick. Since at least the anti-slavery movement of the nineteenth century, mismanagers have used the outside agitator trope to divide people fighting for liberation. During the George Floyd Rebellion, this trope formed the basis of the argument that oppressed people must be guided by some nefarious unseen hand because they lack the courage and commitment to fight back on their own. Similarly, Zionists often suggest that Iran, ISIS, and other outside agitators are secretly steering the entire Palestinian resistance rather than the courage and initiative of the Palestinian people. It was doubly offensive to find the careerists and UChicago faculty members spreading rumors about “outside agitators” running amok in the encampment, populated by dedicated activists willing to put themselves on the line for a free Palestine.

While the shameful history of the outside agitator trope is well known, the particularities of the radical scene in Hyde Park cast it in an even stranger light. Given UChicago's relation to the South Side, both in terms of the administration's underdevelopment of Hyde Park and Woodlawn, as well as the “radical” elements' dependence on local organizing groups and campaigns for training and support, this characterization of community members as anarchic strangers mindlessly wreaking havoc from campus-affiliated organizers is not just ironic and misguided, but a betrayal of the very same principles ostensibly espoused by these radicals: community and solidarity.

In this context, the term “anarchist” became a flexible signifier, conveniently deployed to distance any problematic or frightening individuals from the collective life of the camp: one re-



portback recounts that UCUP *withheld* community support from a “Black Southsider who was attacked on the quad,” with marshals explaining “they’re one of the anarchists.” The activist politicking of the loudest careerist members of Core, its authors argue, stood directly in the way of the realization that Hyde Park “is a gentrified neighborhood because of this filthy campus. These rich kids and out-of-state attendees are part of the reason police so heavily penetrate the south side. Anytime UCPD harasses somebody within the boundaries of Hyde Park and the surrounding neighborhoods, it is a student’s problem.”

Past cohorts of student organizers understood this. In 2016, a student group that campaigned for the trauma center in the South Side wrote in a reportback:

Our organizing on campus has been unique because of our concrete allyship with people who are most affected by the lack of a trauma center...we have supported [the campaign] by organizing students on campus and directing as many University resources as possible to young Black organizers...

The extent to which student organizing on this campus had been successful, whether regarding the Trauma Center campaign, graduate unionization, or the occupation of UCPD’s police station lobby in 2020, was directly correlated to the degree of involvement from *outsiders*, here defined as people who were not university employees or students. Regardless of affiliation, these were people directly impacted by UChicago’s policies and policing who were willing to fight. Indeed, “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,” wrote Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from his Birmingham cell, “tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial ‘outside agitator’ idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider.”

The parochialism of the careerists within Core extended further than the ordinary baiting of outside agitators to their very understanding of the genocide in Gaza itself. Early in the encampment, we began hearing the portmanteau “scholasticide” almost constantly. Coined in 2009 by Dr. Karma Nabulsi of Oxford University, this concept helps us make sense of the deliberate targeting of Palestinian educational institutions by Israeli forces as part of a genocidal effort to erase Palestinian culture. It can be a helpful concept when situated within the multiplicitous facets of Israeli genocide. But as the week wore on, we heard more and more about scholasticide until it seemed like this was the only thing happening in Gaza. The reason for this, we discovered, was that the careerists defined the UChicago encampment and its participants by the distinct subject position of the elite scholar. At a time when millions of people from countless backgrounds and occupations were coming together all over the world in powerful mass demonstrations against Israel, they framed the whole encampment as a matter of elite academics taking action on behalf of academics. Instead of allowing the university to be a site of more generalized struggle, they upheld the social division of labor and focused on their career paths.

It is not an exaggeration to say that some careerists hung the entire occupation on the concept of scholasticide. As negotiations stalled and general assemblies became increasingly contentious around questions of tactical escalation, one prominent careerist argued that the strategic horizon of the camp should be as follows: Negotiators should insist that the university “acknowledge the scholasticide in Gaza.” If the university does not budge, Core should prepare to cooperate in the camp’s eviction by the police. The outcome of the camp, this organizer argued, would be a victory: the “media narrative” in which the “UChicago administration refused to acknowledge a

scholasticide.” When asked what media outlet he thought would care enough about this issue to frame it this way, besides the UChicago student newspaper, the organizer grew quiet. To make matters worse, this was a sidebar conversation when this same organizer publicly avowed that the encampment would stay until divestment. And even if he had succeeded in the plan to throw the whole camp away on the “media narrative” of “scholasticide,” nobody knows what that word means anyway.

“Modern capitalism’s spectacularization of reification,” wrote the Situationist International, “allots everyone a specific role within a general passivity. The student is no exception to this rule. [Theirs] is a provisional role, a rehearsal for his ultimate role as a conservative element in the functioning of the commodity system. Being a student is a form of initiation.” Any serious challenge to the society the university thrives in must begin by rejecting the particular identity of the university student or worker confined to the parochial concerns of the ivory tower and removed from the world’s toil. By forcing the definition of the camp within such narrow parameters, the careerists sought to fix the definition of the camp in the same terms as the capitalist managers of our society do: keeping struggles siloed off from each other and keeping their participants under expert control. An effective movement must consider the university, or wherever else struggle kicks off, to play no privileged role in the global movement, especially with regards to its specialized status within the capitalist division of labor, and to be instead the accidental location from which people can launch a much more generalized struggle, breaking down all walls that divide us in the process. In short, so-called academics must abolish themselves.

## V. Core and Periphery

*Wednesday.* With Columbia’s tear gas and broken windows fresh on our minds, the murmurs of defense and autonomy grew more strident. In addition to the raid of Hind’s Hall, videos of the attack on the UCLA encampment by Zionists aiding the police and the attempted raid on Cal Poly Humboldt demonstrated the threats encampments faced. The threat of police violence became even more pressing when the Dean of Students, Michele Rasmussen, threatened the encampment representatives with a police raid: UCUP had denied responsibility for the graffiti, so this was evidence that “outsiders” had entered the camp, allowing the university administration to claim “safety concerns” as an excuse for dismantling the encampment altogether. Ironically, the penchant of the careerists to red-bait their political opponents in the name of safety was putting us all in danger. In response, student negotiators demanded amnesty for the negotiating representatives, postponement of a police raid on the camp, and a direct meeting with the President and Provost with spectators and a faculty advisor.

However, the rank-and-file’s idea of defense was far more active than the conciliatory horizons advocated by these negotiators. Community members had erected more fences and barricades through Tuesday night and Wednesday morning. Unfortunately, moderate busybodies moved them back or uprooted them by noon. Amongst that day’s official camp schedule of teach-ins and rallies, two shield trainings happened directly under the noses of these careerists. Those involved with coordinating them did so beautifully; someone simply slid up to a hot mic, asked to speak, and told people a “crowd safety” training would be happening, at which people practiced defense drills, formations, and maneuvers with these mobile barricades.

The shields, mostly particle boards colorfully decorated during the previous day's art builds, would become a significant point of contention between the camp's rank-and-file and the careerists over what it meant to take seriously the oft-chanted mantra "We keep us safe." Indeed, the controversy they would generate contains the dynamics of the entire encampment in miniature. Many comrades, particularly those with experience in parts of the US that have seen violent fascist street activity since at least 2016, considered it completely obvious that we would prepare shields and conduct training for using them in formation. Meanwhile, self-identified camp leaders and faculty members, with no street experience besides glorified parades, were openly hostile to the shields and training throughout the week. We understood this dynamic as a token of the uneven dissolution of civil society in the United States. Many Hyde Park intellectuals who speak truth to power from the comfort of the most heavily policed neighborhood in the US, where most fascists are (hilariously enough) afraid to go, mocked the notion that self-defense amounted to anything more than linking hands and presenting your bare forehead to your would-be attacker. Many of us have lived in or traveled to places where vigilantes brutalize and murder leftists: the careerist and faculty denigration of basic self-defense was a delusion born of extreme privilege.

Though everyone at the encampment saw the same brutal acts demonstrated against other encampments and occupations across the country, particularly at Columbia and UCLA, our reactions were sharply divergent. While the rank-and-file's drive to actively defend the camp against the university grew in response to these events, the careerists in Core, formerly content to ride the encampment's popular momentum until it died out, grew increasingly fearful of violent repression and, in turn, popular politics against that repression, which they didn't quite know how to wrangle. Their browbeating and crowding out of radical elements in UCUP had paid off, and these careerists were now the faces of the movement at UChicago. However, it was increasingly likely that this movement would be associated with open and active hostility to the university and its response, extreme brutality. If the careerists were previously content with going home when things died down, it was precisely then that they began to constitute an active tendency that wanted to dismantle the camp: we refer to this tendency as the Surrender Faction.

After Tuesday's conflict over the slight movement of the few barricades present, more tents pushed the camp's boundary further northward. Light barriers and mesh fencing were erected around the North, East, and South sides of the camp in response to incursions by people determined to harass participants, including a right-wing streamer, constantly followed by campers waving flags and keffiyehs in his face, along with fascist frat boys, unhinged Zionists, and other obsessed sickos. Though campers held several "de-escalation" training sessions, hostile actors were previously able to walk through the camp because any kind of barrier was initially deemed an "escalation" and thus out of the question.

Wednesday was May 1<sup>st</sup>, and a May Day march elsewhere in the city had pulled many people away from the camp for the day. At general assemblies, the push for alternatives to Core gained steam, as campers advocated for working groups and a spokescouncil system to replace the shadowy decisions Core announced twice daily. By this time, a popular term circulating throughout the camp and the social media sphere around the encampment movement was the imperative to pursue "escalation." Unfortunately, this remained hazily defined, and even when concrete proposals were floated, such as the occupation of one of the encampment's adjoining buildings, the case was never compellingly made for why we should undertake these tactics, or how they would move the dial forward in the struggle, besides the tautology that they would be an "escalation" and that would be good.

This is a self-critique as much as anything; we believed that the logical next step was to take a building, and we advocated this position. But why? To what end? The most vocal proponents of this plan simply pointed out that it was happening elsewhere. As people in favor of a revolution in the United States, we understand that deepening tactical militancy can be a good thing, especially as it helps cohere new associations of comrades who build trust while building comfort with risk and breaking the law. We could have made this argument plain and won some people over. But the imperative to escalate remained ill-defined, almost an article of faith. What was missing was a coherent and communicable politics behind all the escalatory posturing. In the end, the very idea of “escalation” even ended up being appropriated to mean doing nothing.

*Thursday.* In the morning general assembly, Surrender Factionists presented a plan for ending the encampment. Despite the bluster in the speeches that a handful never tired of subjecting us to, they just wanted to go home. They proposed to host a final Friday rally before disbanding and framed this as a “strategic retreat.” They also presented the Gaza Scholars at Risk program offered by the university administration: UChicago would offer temporary university status to a handful of Palestinian scholars to help them escape the genocide. Though they had not yet discussed or released full details to the general camp, the Surrender Faction framed it as a win. For our part, we considered it a hostage situation in which the administration made the lives of Palestinians and their families conditional on the camp’s good behavior. Meanwhile, in the face of demands for “escalation” from the rank-and-file, some Surrender Faction organizers ostensibly agreed, then liberalized the demands by arguing that “being here is an escalation.” They added that what the university offered was good enough to settle.

Thursday was also the first day the camp negotiators, led by two members of Core, met with President Alivisatos and Provost Baicker. Though the student negotiators declared to the President and Provost they could not make final decisions for the camp and would have to bring any proposals back to the final assembly, the exact details of the negotiations remained secret. The meeting minutes would not be released publicly until the encampment had ended. At general assemblies, Core organizers shared highlights and selections of their meetings with the administration; despite requests to create a negotiation working group to involve the whole camp, none materialized. Thursday also marked the concrete appearance of the Surrender Faction, with an anonymous student negotiator stating, “I don’t want this encampment to go on much longer because what we have seen across the country is scary and disturbing to me.” While this was happening, members of the encampment wanted to do more than just sit around in our tents. That Thursday afternoon, as the pigs tried to take down two Palestinian flags hung up on trees across from the camp, we surrounded their ladders and chanted. Outnumbered and shaking, they only managed to take one flag down before they fled. While this was happening, other campers noticed the large flagpole in front of Levi Hall was empty. A Palestinian flag was quickly attached to the line, flown up, and its line thoroughly taped onto the pole. Protestors protected the flagpole from cops and administrators with bodies and barricades for an hour in the rain until efforts to take it down abated.

Rain continued throughout the day, and Core continuously pushed back the second general assembly. It was not until nearly midnight when we saw Core organizers hurrying under the rain towards the outdoor cloisters between Swift Hall and Bond Chapel that the campers realized that this was the awaited general assembly, where Core would make decisions without their participation. We swarmed in, depriving them of their secrecy. At this meeting, it became clear that the negotiators and the careerists were working closely with the Coalition for Justice in

Palestine (CJP)—ironically enough, an outside organization whose involvement and direction in negotiations UCUP had not disclosed to the camp. We also learned negotiations had already occurred and that UCUP had accepted certain conditions on behalf of the camp without any camp-wide involvement or discussion. Citing the rain, which the enclosure sheltered us from, as the cause for curtailing any deliberation, facilitators rushed through announcements and refused to talk about escalation. Instead, they introduced a CJP member, who addressed the small crowd, attempting to convince us to accept CJP leadership.

While we had been told the meeting would not include deliberation due to time constraints imposed by the weather, CJP's professional organizer filibustered at great length, touting his organization's immense resources and influence. He aggrandized the group's weekly marches in the Loop, which had been steadily declining in participation since October, with no plan for moving beyond this stale form. And he promised that, if placed under CJP control, the encampment would receive a massive infusion of resources and bodies in the coming days.

As he spoke, sighs and murmurs echoed throughout the assembled crowd. A quartet of women in hijabs shook their heads and whispered among themselves; it was not their first run-in with this organizer, and they were not impressed. Multiple attendees, who had braved the miserable weather to have a discussion, spoke out against the lack of transparency on display and the shameless attempts of the Surrender Faction, who had been fighting democracy within the general assembly since day one, to pass off the camp to a third party, since they were themselves clearly out of momentum. If the power should belong to the people, why is it so difficult for some organizers to relinquish control? Tired and wanting to go home, these organizers preferred to install a new sovereign rather than let the camp govern itself. This decision was unpopular, but they successfully maneuvered to end the meeting, taking advantage of everyone's tiredness from listening to the CJP organizer's rant as midnight approached. We left with enhanced division and discontent, high tensions, and no sense of the way forward for the camp.

It is worth reflecting on the sad fact that the careerists and CJP found so many people in the encampment willing to take their proclamations as commands and to help them resist calls for democratizing decision-making. A lack of collective political experience pervading US society has produced a kind of activist who relates to political movements as some combination of consumer and low-level employee, following the directives of whoever represents themselves as in charge, especially if they can pass themselves off as the representative delegate of an oppressed group of people. Despite noble efforts by individuals and crews who were low on pre-existing political connections and were eventually badjacketed for their troubles, no militant and serious opposition bloc appeared capable of reversing the performative, reformist strategic horizon set by the careerists.

We have since concluded that we erred by assuming all of Core was a monolithic bloc that handed down agreed-upon diktats to the mass of participants. We would later learn that Core was, in fact, so internally divided that its meetings primarily served to wear down and alienate *its* radical bloc, who then avoided the charade of the general assemblies. Identifying and building ties with these more radical organizers could have completely altered the face of the encampment, especially given we ascribe no profound social or political intelligence, or even charisma, to the careerists who kept control of the camp. Instead, their success demonstrated a low level of political literacy among the camp's rank-and-file, who most often simply did what Core said; a lack of organization among radical participants; our self-marginalized inability to consider

that we had more potential allies than we realized; and, above all, the insufficiency of all radical participants to build an alternative bloc and political vision with which we might have contested leadership of the camp.

Even if Core was more amenable to radical proposals, the very nature of the group as an informal, invite-only shadow council would curtail its attempts at creating effective decision-making processes. Even though such a structure could successfully delegate tasks during the planning stages, its overworked personnel could not manage and defend the 24/7 on-the-ground logistical operation that is an encampment when secrecy and security were paramount. Between drawn-out difficult meetings where emotions ran high and fearful sleepless nights spent waiting for fascist violence, the organizers failed to see that the much larger community that had gathered around them had a direct interest in the perpetuation of the camp and the skills to accomplish that task in a democratic and accountable manner, without extraneous layers of “leadership.”

On the other hand, the proposed models to “decentralize” decision-making failed to escape their birth conditions. As discussed above, radicals designed effectively the decentralized organizational models of the 1990s to separate tactical deliberation from any discussion of the movement’s disparate strategic horizons. In our case, the creation of a variety of working groups separated radicals, further preventing us from altering the camp’s trajectory with surgical precision: careerists sidelined disputes over their conservative vision for the camp or at least confined them to communities of like-minded but provincial militants, such as the Popular University’s “camp defense” working group. Thus, the careerists were left to shape the broader identity and aims of the camp. Ultimately, the same problems of the camp’s “periphery” bedeviled its “core,” but with fewer avenues to resolve them since one tendency within UCUP could at least make the camp in its image.

Working groups and spokes-councils, which we helped popularize, allowed militants to find each other and laid the foundations for relationships that would outlive the camp. However, movements should be judged at a minimum by whether they achieve their ends, and the “decentralizing” organizational models proposed by well-meaning radicals in the camp brought us no closer to changing the trajectory of the encampment. Rather than well-meaning gestures at democracy, which assume that those deliberating share a shared strategic intelligence and political will, only rarely glimpsed at the encampment, it may benefit movement radicals to build their own broader constituencies of like-minded and skilled militants who can intervene at opportune moments, connected to extant organizations but not beholden to the in-the-moment conservatism of full-time activists. At the outset of further long-term actions, we should also remember that an established organization is difficult to meaningfully alter and push against formalizing what initial secrecy measures may prove necessary to get any substantial action off the ground. *Abolish Core!*

This point brings us back to the importance of coordination between what radical elements of official, aboveground organizations exist and the larger, more spontaneously radical rank-and-file of any given movement—as thankless and frustrating as this work may be. Radicalization of any movement cannot confine itself to flashy (and, for many, alienating) confrontations with organizers, symbolic escalations at protests, or retreats into self-imposed exiles de-linked from the movement. “Escalatory” actions can only become radical if they retain a crowd to win over. This necessary step to politicizing any struggle requires the long-term establishment of trust and shared strategic ends; if leveraged correctly, opportune moments may proliferate to introduce

new, more radical tactics to more sympathetic crowds. As the Palestine movement returns to campuses in the fall, this is a question we and others will have to find new ways to answer.

## VI. A Bang and a Whimper

*Friday.* Word spread around camp that some combination of UChicago fraternities and the usual pro-Israel fascists had been planning a large counter-demonstration around noon under the guise of a “picnic.” UCPD had removed the Palestinian flag flown and protected on Wednesday without confrontation. Perhaps too late, Core began asking campers to avoid asking others about university affiliation, supposedly as a measure of protection for non-students. The careerists were *no longer* concerned about nefarious *outside agitators* since they now courted activists from all over the city to a rally to counteract the counter-protesters. This dynamic is frequent in social movements, in which top-down organizers are willing to use “anarchists” as shock troops and cannon fodder, only to turn around and denounce them at the first opportunity. This day was no exception.

Calls went out across the city to mobilize against the counter-protesters on the quad. Unfortunately, alarmed messages had already emanated from the camp and other Chicago encampments several times, barraging outside supporters with frenzied demands for action that most often simply petered out and were never again remarked upon. Like in 2020, when constant breathless accounts of “Proud Boys” who never seemed to materialize (and who antifascists would have easily defeated if they had) inundated Chicago activist platforms, these undisciplined, near-daily calls of impending invasion served to desensitize people to the reality of vigilante violence and, we experienced, kept some conflict-averse people away from the camp when nothing was happening.

This time, however, there was substance to the rumor. As noon approached, two groups gathered on the far side of the quad under American and Israeli flags. The America camp was louder and more belligerent, blasting racist songs like “Sweet Home Alabama,” as the Zionists did their best job of ignoring the fact that the only real anti-semites on the quad were the men organized to march alongside them. Once the combined counterprotest numbered about fifty, Team America led a march directly toward the camp’s Eastern flank, led by prominent right-wing provocateur Arthur Long, dressed in a cowboy hat and smoking a cigar. They did not get in. Spotting their approach, many campers whom the careerists and their faculty allies were already vilifying as “horizontalists” and “insurrectionary anarchists” sprang into action and confronted the vigilantes head-on. These courageous comrades formed a shield wall that stopped the march and then, in a disciplined maneuver practiced over the previous week, advanced and pushed the fascists back one step at a time.

In the middle of this confrontation, key careerist members of Core suddenly popped up in the ranks of the fascists, their backs turned to the men attacking the camp, demanding that the shield wall back up and disperse. One would later appear in a viral video widely celebrated for his courageous words outside the evicted encampment. Thankfully, in the thick of the action, nobody listened to him.

The shield wall and the willingness of some of the campers to physically stand up for themselves proved to be too much for the invaders, and they were forced back and slowly dispersed. Meanwhile, at the exact moment of this retreat, Chicago cops began to appear on the camp’s

Western flank. Dozens of the same people who had just defended the camp against one threat sprang into action, forming another shield wall around the rear perimeter. The energy was electric. Campers distributed water and plastic goggles to anyone holding a shield. Defiant lines formed on the Eastern and Western flanks as Core's rally began, where they could give their usual speeches.

We cannot emphasize enough the excitement in the encampment following this display of collective courage. We saw its numbers swell to the largest they had ever been, and a collective buzz of energy and enthusiasm was palpable. We had seen what it could look like to mobilize to defend the camp, and many people were on board. Sensing this growing tactical militancy, several Surrender Factionists would later try to vilify the people who had defended the camp, saying they had engaged in violence and had *put vulnerable people in danger*, in a classic case of Orwellian doublespeak. At the same time, we could not shake one scene in particular: leaders of the camp's self-proclaimed governing body standing in a sea of vigilantes, turning their backs toward the men who wished to attack the camp. When fascists and antifascists square off in large demonstrations, police turn their backs on the side they feel more affinity with.

*Saturday.* The morning light revealed the growing fortifications of the camp. The Surrender Factionists, forced to soften their anti-radical sentiments by popular support for the previous day's confrontation, stopped trying to tear down the additional fencing and wooden barriers. While negotiations and rallies continued at UChicago's camp, elsewhere in the city, students of other universities planned their actions and encampments. That morning, students from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago set up their encampment on the lawn of the Art Institute itself. Their encampment quickly drew a sizable presence of CPD and an armed SWAT team, and when raided only hours after being set up, faced a brutal police response that never fully materialized at UChicago.

At that evening's general assembly at the UChicago encampment, a representative from CJP, who had yet to muster virtually anything in the way of the promised resources or bodies for the camp, managed nonetheless to put in the hard work of reading a prepared statement denouncing the SAIC students who had faced down brutality and arrest just hours earlier. The CJP statement condemned them for following principles of "horizontalist" organizing instead of putting CJP in charge of their action. In these same remarks, CJP promised the UChicago encampment that as long as they followed CJP leadership, assistance in terms of "community support" (CJP's ability to mobilize crowds) and a CJP "defense specialist" would protect them from facing a similar response from CPD or UCPD. While speakers at UChicago rallies earlier in the day had invoked the Haymarket martyrs and Kent State shootings while condemning state violence against protestors, there was no sympathy or solidarity for the 68 students arrested at SAIC among the careerists and their allies. While many campers were disgusted by this and made it known, other participants in the night's "reportback" leveraged the arrests to push their provincial claims to political authority—from CJP representatives to a few local radicals who jumped on the story, and amplified CJP's denunciation of "horizontalists" just like them, simply to settle old scores.

Despite all this nonsense, the large crowd gathered for this assembly called a vote on the future of the camp and voted overwhelmingly to stay and defend it in the face of a police raid. That evening, as negotiations on the Gaza Scholars at Risk program between Core organizers and the university continued, new metal and wooden barricade materials appeared in the camp. Following its pattern of appropriating the language of rank-and-file opposition (and redefining it to the point of meaninglessness), Core began to claim to be "horizontalizing" the camp. They



backtracked, clarifying they were not sharing “leadership” with other organizations. Surrender Faction made this hierarchy very clear when they cleverly redefined the meaning of the popular notion that we ought to “defend the camp.”

*Sunday morning.* The morning assembly focused on two questions: Will we defend the encampment? If so, how? Although an overwhelming number of participants had voted to “defend the camp” rather than fleeing in the face of police the previous night, the Surrender Faction had repackaged this resolution by the morning to mean: *We will defend the camp by fleeing it in such a way that press films a small number of our arrests while holding (but not using) shields.* As a participant would later note, this traded defense plans for efforts at “the symbolic appearance of defense.”

The meeting started with an update on negotiations. Core organizers claimed they had stalled the university’s negotiating team to gain time. The university had asked which of the listed demands of the encampment was the easiest to fulfill, to find a small concession they could hand over. The negotiators stated this was in good faith. However, it was unclear whether the university negotiators saw it as such or believed they could bargain any concession from the university in exchange for pledging to pull down the camp. Under pressure, key careerists dismissed the idea of ending the encampment in exchange for symbolic gains and “rejected” any outcome other than a serious win. After this report, the general assembly body as a whole intended to split into groups to discuss as small groups how people felt about defending the camp, along with preferred methods.

At this time, a representative of FJP arrived to give an imposition from the “Red Faculty” group, who had previously touted their willingness to be involved in peaceful, photo-op arrests. Some of these same professors had tried to run in front of the shield wall on Friday to stop the fascist counterprotest, armed with nothing but middle-class respectability and vibes, until the real threat of physically violent, drunken frat boys forced them to retreat. Two days later, they proclaimed they would not be involved if campers used shields to defend the encampment like Friday’s raid. Furthermore, they announced that Chicago Teachers’ Union (CTU) union members were ready and willing to defend the encampment but would likely be unwilling if campers used shields. (They further clarified that CTU members would also be unable to assist the encampment late on school nights, which was somewhat striking, considering that they brought this up as a considerable consideration on a Sunday.) These announcements heavily influenced the flow of conversation and opinion within the small group discussions that followed immediately after.

After the announcement from the FJP representative, the breakout group discussions began in earnest. In these groups, attendees broadly discussed, in small part, the question of what they would be willing to accept in exchange for conceding the encampment and, in large part, the methods people wished to pursue to protect it. Several “Red Faculty” pushed hard against campers using any form of shield during those meetings. After group sessions, everyone returned to the G to report back, with a representative chosen by each group to summarize their discussion. The reports roughly displayed a mood of hesitance about any kind of action: much concern about provoking cops and much hope that “Red Faculty” would be able to defend the encampment alongside large groups of rallied protesters. Faculty practically uninvolved in the camp’s life and invested in nothing more than a televised video of their willing arrest were thus able to derail serious discussions among those who wanted to defend the camp.

In practice, the breakout group structure precluded any effective decision-making. After three-plus hours, Core did not hold a vote, nor was any other conclusive means of moving forward

offered, and they actively sequestered dissent and discussion *away* from decision-making processes. We noticed a consistent pattern in which the careerists would identify a person advocating for strategy and tactics to the left of their own, surround them, and lead them away from large groups. Following this general assembly, a small group split off to discuss a defense plan, primarily consisting of Core organizers. Core postponed more comprehensive defense plans until the afternoon. They also officially announced the Gaza Scholars at Risk program to the public. However, those negotiations quickly broke down without the administration's concrete commitment to the program. Meanwhile, rumors of an impending eviction spread and the careerists once more shed their fear of outside agitators, calling for a community "mobilization" to descend on the camp.

*Sunday evening.* After all the encampment's rallies and speeches, bold declarations and rhetorical gestures toward the possibility of another world, and tokens of courage large and small, what happened next strikes us as the peerless apex of the entire UChicago encampment experience. After the Surrender Faction organizers had successfully recast the vote to "defend the camp" as a retreat, replete with photo-op arrests for them and their faculty pals, they vanished into another of their elite meetings to fine-tune the conditions of our surrender. With no visible representatives of the camp's power structure and with the buzz of a potential post-midnight police raid in the air, someone with no authority to tell anyone to do anything began to pick up chairs, pallets, and other stray wood, linking it all together to fortify the camp's weak and largely symbolic barricade.

Slowly, others joined in. Dozens of people, many of whom had not participated in any of the sham decision-making at the general assembly, much less talked to each other before this moment, joined together to repurpose an impressive array of supplies to build a genuinely defensible wall. Tables, chairs, wood scraps, and two-by-fours began to vanish from nearby university buildings. Five twelve-foot panels of chain link fencing, destined for some pointless construction project or another, became a solid flank along the likeliest entry point for a police raid. As the fortifications around our encampment grew, some of the careerists watched uneasily; we overheard some commenting bitterly to each other that, in case of a police raid, there would be *hours and hours* of notice, as the cops would not simply drop from the sky. Others tried to dissuade rank-and-filers from building barricades with alternating threats and pleas, most of which were politely acknowledged and summarily brushed aside. Despite their disapproval, the many people who wished to preserve the camp and its power worked on, wordlessly cooperating to place as many obstacles between a future police raid and the camp interior as possible. As the walls grew higher, campers taking power into their own hands intelligently fortified the camp for the first time since its establishment.

At midnight, the forces of the encampment and the swelling crowd that had answered the call to defend the camp gathered in the northwest corner of the quad in groups parceled out by personal risk assessment. Core had initially designated a three-color gradation of risk: according to the defense plan, Red was for those people who would stay as a final layer until the end and get arrested by the pigs; Yellow was for those who would remain in front of the Reds until the "final arrest warning," then would leave; and Greens were those who would leave at the order of dispersal. People were encouraged to break out into their groups and speak with each other, then wait to gather in their positions when the cops arrived. One of the problems with this color-based safety grouping was its fatalistic nature, with the Reds blurring the line between *wanting*

to be arrested and *willing but not preferring* to be arrested. And by more or less intending to get uneventfully arrested, many of the Reds proved to be the most useless.

The color system's rigidity also discouraged thinking about what actions campers could take to defend the camp that would be risky but would not automatically lead to arrest. We who are comfortable breaking the law but want to *get away with it* struggled to relate to people, especially the Red faculty, who seemed overly eager to don flex cuffs. As the encampment broke out into color groups and began to talk and plan, many realized their risk assessments did not fully map onto this three-color system. The organic creation of the "Orange" role and the organizers' concession to the crowd by making it an "official" category revealed the willingness of many people within the crowd to take risks without a fatalistic attitude of sacrificial arrest. Meetings were then held with the four new color roles, as organizers went over the plan for evacuation of the Greens, the fallback plans of the Yellows and Oranges, and the final "defense" of the Reds.

At this juncture, the stunning naivety of the camp's self-styled leaders became obvious. Their clever plan for evacuating Greens hinged on the Greens making their way to the camp's welcome tent, where graduate students would escort them through the line of riot cops and into "safe" buildings. The rationale? These graduate students were *unionized* and thus had contractual workplace protections, which the architects of this plan imagined the police would recognize and would magically encompass escorted non-GSU campers. Furthermore, we would eventually learn that the administration's threat model placed building occupations and all attempts at initiating such an action at the top of their escalation ladder. Any attempt to enter buildings, even just to "pass through" them, would have been understood by police as the beginning of a building occupation and would have prompted violent escalation from campus or city police. As those moving through the buildings in this scenario would've been the most risk-averse individuals during an active and chaotic raid, this approach would likely have resulted in myriad casualties.

At this time, nobody was sure whether the raiding party would be UCPD or the regular Chicago cops, who openly delight in tuning their clubs on activists' heads. We had seen the images from Columbia, UCLA, and other campuses; we believed we ought to prepare for that level of aggression. In a heated exchange, someone asked a large group of careerists if any of them had any experience dealing with *actual* riot cops. To their credit, they answered honestly: no.

*Monday morning.* No police raid materialized. In the hours between the defense planning meeting and the dispersal of the crowd around 3 a.m., campers held various meetings intended to iron out the details. These changed and evolved as people began to think of different ways to defend the camp, including staying behind the barricades. In the Orange meeting, some participants pushed against the notion that *abandoning the camp was preserving it*. The facilitator promptly shut this down. When another Orange spoke up, demanding a vote on the matter, someone said, "Look, another white man asking for a vote." These interventions were too little, too late. And it was sad to see. Many campers had built the barricades and reconsidered what it meant to defend the camp, talking of possibilities of resisting from within the walls we had built instead of a slow abandonment, which now seemed all but certain.

The improvised Orange category was the only silver lining in this sad spectacle. While Red faculty prepared to upload new default Facebook photos of their righteous brushes with the law, Oranges openly discussed the tactic of "de-arrest," in which they planned to grab arrestees and pull them away from police. Regrettably, this escalation was promising but did not generalize to defending the whole camp.

Students and faculty arrived at the Main Quad in the morning to find the encampment fortified with materials appropriated from across campus: it was a beautiful sight! However, as campers tried to reinforce them throughout the day, cops grew more aggressive toward people bringing wood toward the barricades, leading campers to suspend such efforts. One incident was particularly illuminating. After a comrade was stopped and namechecked by cops simply for moving a two-by-four about five inches over the mesh fencing, he decided that the best use of his time was to show us how to tape books around our torsos and avoid internal organ damage before he left. Exhausted from the late night, on edge, and stressed, the Monday crowd was much smaller and quieter, though there was still some talk of defense. From nightfall onwards, cops systematically entered and swept through every building, from top to bottom, around the encampment. Coupled with the pigs' renewed and intensified aggression towards anyone who came within a few inches of the barricades with material, it was clear to us that whatever directive from the top brass that previously had kept the cops in check was no longer in play.

*Monday evening.* At 10:58 pm, a public announcement from a local journalist broke the tension: a "well-placed source [told him] the University of Chicago will attempt to clear the [encampment] at 3AM tonight." This announcement immediately kicked off a panicked firestorm of activity, and people began heading back towards the encampment. The raid tip-off had forced the self-declared leadership and the various camp defenders to lurch out of the day's inertia for something like a last stand. Our ranks, however, looked quite spindly; the encampment was down in terms of personnel in general, but specifically and critically, most of the people who had both the experience for and commitment to defending the camp were not there. Those most personally involved in the camp's defense had returned to their various homes and jobs due to the start of the work week and the exhaustion of having prepared for a complete defense the previous night when no threat materialized. Also, they had gotten sick of being red-baited and insulted by the careerists and their faculty allies, especially after the shield wall had saved the day on Friday. While we all vowed to stay until the end, we can't fault those who had taken or were prepared to take significant risks to protect the camp only to be thrown under the bus by the opportunists who now, once more, cried for help.

The actual raid's threatening imminence, compared to the interminable yap sessions of the weekend's general assemblies, forced the differing factions to attempt to collaborate in earnest. Comrades who had pushed for a clear and practiced defense strategy without conceding to mass arrests and clearance as an inevitability suddenly found themselves consulting with marshals and leadership, who had previously railroaded them out of meetings, to formulate a last-minute defense protocol. After frenetic discussions over whether to take the tip-off seriously, an announcement was posted to the UCUP Telegram channel at 12:03 AM that they had "received credible information that police WILL be carrying out a raid against the UChicago encampment in the coming hours." At 2:03 AM, a penultimate update before the go-home signal went out on the channel: all buildings were locked.

In those two hours, sympathetic Core members and a prominent camp defender began to coordinate a defense plan with three main points of action. First, all valuables and "Greens" were to be immediately evacuated from the encampment via cars. Second, barricade materials were to be staged near the Western flank of the camp so that defenders could control the Western routes to the quad when the time came. Third, organizers were to announce and coordinate a mass mobilization, marking the climactic action of an orderly retreat on Ellis Avenue. With community members with defense experience largely absent and with no practicable, practical,

and pre-existing plan for defense, a successful defense of the camp appeared implausible. The careerists had wasted so much time with their filibusters and silly little games that all actual preparations for a potentially dangerous encounter with the police were now improvised ad hoc, absent many of the people who would have given us a fighting chance. A relocation to Ellis and march away from the encampment site would at least offer the possibility of a strategic retreat that could preserve the equipment and capacity necessary to continue the struggle.

Initially, Core organizers proceeded with these suggestions with total and immediate cooperation; however, this only lasted a little more than an hour and a half before the gridlock of the previous days soaked into the plans and undermined the on-the-fly camp defense strategy. Of the plan's three points, the first happened, the second did not, and they bungled the third. A considerable amount of valuable equipment (construction tools, sound systems, etc.) and vulnerable people did escape, having been whisked away shortly after midnight. When campers and sympathetic Core members at the encampment moved to relocate the barricades, resistance against physical defense from the Surrender Faction stonewalled this effort. Lastly, instead of the proposed strategic retreat and rally on Ellis, for which UCUP had begun to put out mobilization messages, these Core members changed their minds, choosing to mobilize on the quad, which provided much more risk of encirclement and no practical direction of retreat.

The proposed joint plan for evacuation and a mobile retreat soon settled back into the careerists' initial plan of visible arrest for those who craved it and uncoordinated scattering for others, as no one was certain *where* the rally was supposed to occur. After this point, coordination between camp defenders and Core organizers broke down, not resuming until the raid earnestly began around 5:30 AM. The proposed strategy *did* supplant Core's complete fantasy of miraculous graduate students leading Greens through buildings to safety, which was the backbone of Core's initial defense plans. Unsuccessful attempts to meaningfully coordinate between Core and camp defenders on Tuesday morning likely helped to avert a much worse clusterfuck.

*Tuesday.* At 3:30 in the morning, notable members of Core announced that a raid was not imminent, and everyone who had shown up for defense could go home. By this point, however, it was a *fait accompli* that "defense" really just meant handing the camp over to the cops and *maybe* watching a few professors and student movement bureaucrats get cuffed on camera in the process. So most people had stayed home in the first place. And why wouldn't they?

Around 4:30 AM, after the all-clear signal had already gone out on Telegram, two UCPD SUVs blazed onto the Quad, steps away from the encampment's Eastern flank. In an unpredicted turn of events in all defense discussions, the cops did not give ample warning of their arrival: they did not stage en masse, nor did they slowly creep up on the encampment. Instead, they utilized the extreme mobility of cars and armored personnel carriers: they drove directly to the front of the encampment, and kitted-out riot cops unloaded en masse on the doorstep of the camp. Within seconds, they were already within the walls of the largely undefended encampment before anyone could even realize, much less put out calls for mobilization. UCPD officers and Allied Security rent-a-cops ripping apart the (unattended and unwatched) barricades roused the few students (many of them Core organizers) and community members left in their tents. One student was pushed down and injured by a UCPD officer as the campers were forced out of their tents and quickly pushed off the quad.

UCPD then put up plastic barricades between one entrance to the quad, which became the rallying point as community members and students trickled in. The evicted campers formed a line against the barricades, and there were moments when the front-line group of thirty or so began

to push against the cops, forcing them back a few steps before reaching a stalemate. Prominent Core members who had denounced the shield action were seen, in these heated moments, using the plastic barricades against the cops! Perhaps they had learned the error of their ways. Or maybe they hoped to salvage their arrest photo-ops from an eviction designed to prevent them.

The crowd grew slowly. News reporters rolled in, and photographers snapped pictures of the crowd, still small in the early morning hours. Eventually, the shoving match with the cops stopped, and waves of chanting continued until a little after 7 AM when the police suddenly pulled back the barricades. The students and gathered crowd broke out into cheers, but just as they marched through the entrance to the Main Quad, the last of the utility cars rolled away, and the emptiness of the quad revealed itself. The only traces left of the camp were squares of raw ground and yellowed grass. UCPD officers loitered at the entrance of Levi Hall but otherwise had disappeared, their job done. They had cleared the camp, arrested nobody, and averted the potential for spectacle. UChicago beat the student and faculty organizers, who thought themselves astute practitioners of social movement realpolitik, at their own game; the university knew they wanted symbolic arrests and deprived them of even this little victory.

At this, the crowd of about a hundred people that had built over the morning gathered in front of the steps to Levi, as students and campers stood in front of the steps, arms and hands locked together in the manner they had learned over the past week. But it was too late. There was nothing left to defend. Student organizers led the same old chants and gave a few short speeches, but the (threat of) rain swept the scene clear of people. The encampment was over. As of writing, CJP's promised resources and cavalry in exchange for the encampment renouncing some of its most dedicated activists have yet to arrive. Even when eviction had loomed as a matter of mere hours, CJP's leadership and its imaginary battalions stayed home.

## VII. In The Aftermath

Two attempts to harness the movement's energy, or whatever remained of it, illustrate the crossroads we face moving forward. On the Saturday following the camp's eviction, UChicago Students for Justice in Palestine called for an action to disrupt the university's Alumni Weekend. After a predictable litany of concern trolling from the careerists, the action amounted to little more than red handprints on some beer tents alumni were drinking in—which the Surrender Faction scrambled to help clean up. Meanwhile, another crowd had gathered on the Midway Plaisance. The rally began with the usual chanting, but as it turned into a march, the composition of this crowd—which brought genuine efforts to protect identities and a lack of campus careerists—promised something different from the morning's art project. As the crowd advanced down Woodlawn, the leaders drew the crowd to the Institute of Politics, where a group of people dressed in bloc quickly moved up the steps and into the building. As the rest of the crowd either milled on the sidewalk or rushed excitedly to the porch, the militants inside got to work, blocking entrances and hanging banners from the roof. No longer the Institute of Politics, now the Casbah Bassel Al-Araj, the occupiers declared: "1. Free Palestine 2. Abolish the University 3. Land Back 4. Fuck Gentrification 5. Fuck 12."

The occupiers held the building for about half an hour before the cops broke through. The pigs didn't arrest anybody as the occupiers climbed out the front windows and into the safety of the crowd below. Meanwhile, a festive vibe continued outside the building well into the night. The

militants who carried out the occupation have their productive critiques of how the action went. For those on the outside, it impressed upon us what could be accomplished by those willing to simply ignore the bureaucratic machinations of the movement's self-styled leaders and seize an opportunity to do something.

This autonomous action also visibly invigorated the crowd. Throughout the evening, protestors demonstrated a willingness to press up against the cops and move against them as a crowd, even beginning to surround them with improvised barricades of patio furniture and pushing them out of the Casbah's backyard. The careerist Core members left out of the planning for this action arrived late and immediately attempted to co-opt and "de-escalate" by standing between cops and protestors, as well as preventing efforts to remove cops from the Casbah grounds. At one point, they tried to convince the crowd to move onto the Main Quad; the crowd summarily ignored them. While they had to be publicly supportive of the occupation, lest they lose face, their actions on the ground and commentary after the fact made clear their disapproval of an action occurring on campus outside their purview, without their structure of marshalls, police liaisons, and other elements of safety theater.

The Casbah educated the campus' Palestine movement in practice where the encampment had tried—with thornier results—to raise political consciousness. A group of militants unaffiliated with any aboveground organization had pulled off an attack on a building that routinely hosted the University of Chicago's political allies, from Lori Lightfoot to Anthony Blinken. They had done so without arrests and had demonstrated to non-occupying participants that a sufficiently brave and intelligent crew could take decisive action against the university without UCUP sanction. A degree of coordination and militancy relegated to distant Columbia and Cal Poly Humboldt occupiers suddenly arrived at the University of Chicago—and the window of what campus militants considered possible shifted as a result.

Who were they? These occupiers had left the camp early, as we were digging in for a protracted (and losing) struggle to shape its outcome, and had simply invested their energy elsewhere. As in our failure to establish contact with the radical bloc of Core, we had been operating largely ignorant of their existence, leading us to mistakenly consider ourselves an insignificant minority in the movement's rank-and-file. The Casbah action taught us that this way of thinking was misguided—that numerical minorities can practically shift what seems possible to the majorities in which they move.

As the genocide in Palestine continues and the movement opposing it deepens in the coming year, we ought to take note of the newfound ability shown by these comrades to model the leading edge of the struggle. To that end, we can only benefit from coordinating our actions to test and expand the bounds of what the movement considers possible. The next leg of the struggle will not be without similar opportunities—and "when radical moments come around, we must grasp them with both hands."

By contrast, at the University of Chicago's graduation, a small group of dedicated militants had decided to use a crowd gathered during a walkout to facilitate an interruption of a graduation ceremony nearby. UCPD responded with relatively-uncharacteristic force: not only was the planned site of the post-walkout rally barricaded off, but the members of the crowd who threw themselves at the police barriers were summarily pepper sprayed, taking many out of commission for the rest of the day.

As the confrontation escalated, those willing to stand at the barricades dwindled, and the militancy of the crowd's response lessened; eventually, the sixty-year-old mother of a graduate

was picked off, pulled over the barricade, pinned to the ground, and arrested. The remaining crowd shied away from confronting the police, chanting instead: “We are the Intifada, we are the revolution.” We can’t think of a better visualization of the careerists’ politics than this. Meanwhile, the various blocs of the Chicago organizing crowd revealed themselves under stress: vocal liberals jumped on the moment with calls to disperse, while others seized the opportunity to yell at police; aspiring movement leaders (thankfully kept from positions of authority in this instance) gave speeches to an inattentive crowd, as UCPD and CPD vans rolled up to block the path between the barricades and our target.

After this first battery of speeches, a particularly visible careerist from the encampment began to march the crowd in the *opposite* direction of the site where organizers slated an interruption to occur, a decision thankfully reversed by action leadership, who proved sympathetic to the militant edge of the crowd. Once the march had reached the site of the planned intervention, organizers had to coax the careerists into bringing the crowd up to the stage, where a dozen or so of CJP-action attendees lingered—too few to pull off the planned disruption. But this last-ditch effort to secure a victory in defeat was delayed by *more speeches*. Ultimately, when the crowd declined to follow one militant over a set of red velvet ropes suggesting protestors not pass, this too was stymied, leaving them to bounce off a couple of UCPD officers.

## VIII. Free Palestine, Free Yourself

Where to go after the encampments? We consider this an open question that we should debate honestly, free from pleasing illusions and clichés, among the sizable mass of activists mobilized by the encampment wave. Answering this question requires clear-eyed assessments of the limits each encampment ran into, considered alongside the most promising political developments they brought into being. We hope that our efforts to outline the contours of the UChicago encampment will help broaden such a discussion, and we encourage others to similarly reflect and respond to our assessment of our own experiences. The lessons of the encampment wave are not readily apparent; we must draw them from collective thinking and debate, ideally outside toxic and superficial discourse found on social media. Now that the encampments are mostly gone, the energy and hope conjured by these bold actions of building commons, no matter how limited, can either be folded back into a dull and failing reformism or else can point toward a new chapter in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist politics. On the most basic level, this necessitates the hard work of defining what the camps were and what the post-encampment moment could be.

As encampments across the country have come under fire from the political right and experienced repression from university administrations and police forces alike, many progressive commentators have defended them as legally valid exercises in “free speech.” In a particularly nuanced analysis, UChicago history professor Gabriel Winant argued that our encampment was acceptable within the standards of the Kalven Report, a 1967 document prescribing the university adopt broad political neutrality, according to the so-called Chicago Principles, and permit all manner of free expression. Claiming that the “encampment embodies only free expression and modest inconvenience,” Winant accidentally underscored the trap set by well-meaning movement supporters who were desperate to keep them within the bounds of respectable liberal democratic participation. And it is precisely these bounds that the Pro-Palestine movement must escape if it is ever to be anything besides a futile exercise in “speaking truth to power.”



The UChicago Popular University for Gaza's material power was not its righteous speech. It was bold, collective action against rules, order, respectability, and sometimes laws. The Core members who understood the encampment as a lawful exercise in speaking truth to power were the camp's most conservative voices and spent far more time attacking leftists and undercutting the encampment's ability to sustain itself than they did fighting to free Palestine.

"There is no doubt that the state is taking us seriously," Don Hamerquist wrote in the *Anti-Racist Action Research Bulletin* in May 2001.

We should also take ourselves seriously. Playing the innocent victim is not serious. Treating repressive policies as if they were reflexive reactions of idiots and thugs is not serious. Much of the content of movement talk about 'criminalizing dissent,' about mass and pre-emptive arrests, about police brutality and 'non-lethal weaponry' substitutes a liberal public relations stance, and an ineffectual one at that, for an analysis. We won't get anywhere or gain anything by reacting to incidents of repression with appeals to civil libertarian rights to protest. The state isn't committed to these 'rules of the game,' and the movement isn't either—or at least it shouldn't be.

Campers widely mocked University of Chicago President Paul Alivisatos when he wrote: "I believe the protesters should also consider that an encampment, with all the etymological connections of the word to military origins, is a way of using force of a kind rather than reason to persuade others." Laughing off this observation as the words of a bookish administrator created a missed opportunity. After all, was he wrong? Was the purpose of the camp to use reason to persuade others? Why did those claiming their actions would "Globalize the Intifada" react derisively to the idea that they were considered partisans in a military operation? The activists who sought to laugh off Alivisatos told us more about *their* sense of the encampment's political importance than anything.

When our activities are all in good fun within the rules of capitalist hegemony, this is a critical flaw to redress immediately. The notion that the camps were "just expressive conduct" played into the dead-end strategy that understood them as efforts to communicate with university elites rather than the basis for taking space and exerting political will as an end in itself. Rather than beg for respectability and legitimacy in the eyes of the very institutions we seek to destroy, we must instead strive to become the menace our enemies already believe us to be.

To this effect, a curious slogan brought great promise to the encampment, which it largely squandered: "Globalize the Intifada!" Few sentiments we have heard capture the fundamental interconnectedness of the struggle for Palestinian self-determination with the global fight against capitalism and the crises it wreaks, however unevenly, throughout all societies and struggles for self-determination. The Palestinian resistance represents some of the bravest and most innovative tactical incursions against the repressive might of global capital, and to place ourselves as part of that struggle is both enlivening and sobering in terms of what it may call upon us to do. After all, why were we out in the streets at all, marching beneath the Palestinian flag if not because of the bold, unsafe, and illegal action taken on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023?

It was thus profoundly absurd to witness the self-styled leaders of the camp, in between baiting "outside agitators," "horizontalists," and all the other bogeymen, situating themselves in the most militant expression of antiracist global resistance, all the while shutting down proposals that would be inoffensive to Greenpeace. One might imagine that in Hyde Park, a flagrantly

colonial outpost, intelligent analyses of race would be the ground floor for thinking politically. This imagining would assume that the stars of the University of Chicago's activist scene were interested in thinking politically. But many of the encampment's loudest voices were only willing to bring up racial politics so far as it bolstered their conservative tactical preferences—going home, listening to the police, actively intervening against confrontations with racists.

To this end, the careerists within Core bludgeoned proponents of any tactical response to the encampment's many threats with the promise that self-defense would invite brutality on the camp's Black and Brown participants. Toeing this line, set by the Coalition for Justice in Palestine's affiliates and "defense specialist," did not provide the security it promised. When the raid *did* come, they were nowhere to be seen: a CJP affiliate had called off the camp's defense, and the night watch had broken down, leaving the door open to racialized police violence. But when students took to the barricades against UCPD the following morning, the only injuries were from batons—which would have been prevented by more generalized shield training. By refusing to dignify the political militancy, which they had professed, with any commensurate action or analysis, these movement bureaucrats-in-training had added nothing of value to the struggle over which they claimed unearned leadership.

It would be cheap to settle on the inadequacy of our activist fellow travelers or to belabor the reticence of CJP crowds to confront the police uniformly. All struggle develops unevenly, and Chicago crowds are scarce in the necessary practical expertise to make large-scale confrontations imaginable or advisable. The graduation action's failure points us to its parts, which may otherwise have added up to a more successful conclusion: (1) our relation to the various blocs of this campus' pro-Palestine movement, (2) our understanding of UCPD's tactics and penchant for violence, and (3) the way the two might combine to open opportunities for tactics more adequate to our strategic ends.

First, the division of Core between the Surrender Factionists and disparate radicals largely determines their willingness to work with movement radicals. The likelihood of successful, non-alienating escalation at any action depends partly on whether the action's leadership will jump to condemn and isolate its more ambitious participants. However, we should not see this dependency as a static fact. At certain moments, the willingness of the more conservative or undecided segments of the public-facing Core to condone more radical tactics widens: during the standoff with UCPD at the barricades during graduation or in the immediate aftermath of the raid, confronting the police was a real (if missed) possibility. The near-willingness of Core to rely on movement radicals in the lead-up to the raid also opens a question for us: to what degree can we rely on the cooperation of conservatives within the student movement, especially as they become aware that it is necessary to defend themselves against police and fascists? This question is unresolved, but it suggests the nascent radical bloc within this movement may expand as police confrontations become more common. We must sharpen our discernment concerning our participation in these movements; we should be ready to conclude, for example, that some public-facing actions, especially ones led by careerists, are not worth our time; we should also be able to identify actions that are sufficiently disruptive, tactically advantageous, and populated by the right blocs of activist participants as being worth our time. Navigating between burnout-inducing pliability and over-conservative abstention will have to be hashed out practically.

Moreover, at every step of the encampment and ensuing actions, any received wisdom about campus police—the ubiquity of arrest warnings, the usefulness of police liaisons, the relative unwillingness of UCPD to harm protestors, the risks of self-defense, etc.—was made obsolete

by shifting police responses to student radicalism. As the Palestine movement's actions drew in more community members, including non-UChicago participants, UCPD practices commonplace during prior actions were abandoned. It is not clear whether the results trend uniformly towards violence and away from "soft" counterinsurgency, but the rank-and-file officers demonstrated a good deal of anger and distress during camp dispersal and graduation; pepper spray and violent arrest were new for many at the barricades. With increased police violence against protestors has come a broader recognition of the importance of "crowd safety" and self-defense—as this realization continues to spread through the more conservative elements of Core, it may be possible to close the gap between their aims and ours at crucial moments.

Lastly, as self-defense increasingly becomes the order of the day, we could stand to isolate ourselves less. Promoting best practices, in light of an observed track record of increased brutality against students by UCPD, could bring these two tendencies into a productive whole: crowds that know how to defend themselves have at least one requisite component of being brave when the moment demands it. Opening the door for unlikely militants to act out their political commitments is tactically advantageous for the entire movement. As before, this will teach us that certain crowds are not worth our limited energy to help "skill up"; this uneven development of struggle, however, also extends to anyone who arrives willing to employ riskier tactics.

The main obstacle facing any campus organizing project is the contradiction between those whose interests are limited to the parochial matters of managerial campus politics and those who see the campus as one (small) part of a much larger terrain of struggle. The presence of people with no affiliation to the University of Chicago was the primary strength of its encampment. They helped us expand our horizons beyond bureaucratic jockeying within a single intractably evil and elite institution and orient outward instead to the struggles unfolding all around the globe. Ultimately, a dead-end alternative to this necessary vision won out, for the same reason the encampment ended with a whimper: *we didn't have enough outside agitators!*

It bears repeating that none of this implies, as a common narrative of recent struggles runs, that an impetus toward the correct strategy emerged spontaneously, or that we offered one, only for the "counterinsurgents" in Core to somehow sideline a vital and focused fighting force. Instead, one of the most alarming products of our collective reflection on the encampment movement is the absolute shortage of strategic insights on the part of most participants, including ourselves. Looking back, it is quite frankly alarming how the demands of the encampment imposed a stifling political horizon on our thinking and limited all collective thinking to narrow questions of tactics. When a comrade recently asked us why none of us had proposed a strike of graduate workers to coincide with the encampment, for example, nobody could answer except to say that we were probably debating how to expand the physical footprint of the camp twenty feet in one direction or another when we should have been drafting that proposal. Ultimately, the push for "escalation," absent a broader strategic horizon, amounted to a more militant version of the careerists' plan to use the encampment to speak truth to power, as opposed to the deliberate cultivation of counter-power capable of existing for itself.

The conflicts around "escalation" in the day-to-day narrative of the camp also reveal the limits of the term as it became memeified. Campers occupied Hind's Hall on Day 2 of the UChicago encampment; hashtags like #EscalateforGaza, accounts like Escalate Network, and zines entitled "We Don't Need Safety — We Need To Escalate!" meant we were responding to the idea within the encampment wave. The phrase passed around the camp and came to mean anything from moving a plywood wall, spray painting a statue, occupying a building, or just remaining on the

quad. From the beginning, we wanted to catch up to other camps that “escalated” to avoid becoming another Northwestern. The camp was an attempt to get leverage over the administration, intended to cause enough of a disturbance to force concessions. Once inside the camp, however, escalation became limited by the form of the camp. It became difficult to see beyond the day-to-day conflicts over what “escalation” meant and the proliferating images of escalation clouded real-time analysis of our particular possibilities. Some may have been calling to move “from the campus to the streets,” but what was on people’s minds was moving from the lawn to the buildings. It was either escalate or surrender, but our discussions of “escalation” never moved towards what a long-term escalation strategy might look like coming out of the camp.

This experience is not unique to the encampment but instead represents a common experience we have shared in moments of upsurge when abstract thinking is a luxury and issues that take up a tremendous amount of time, such as whether someone ought to have knocked over a garbage can, seem in retrospect to be ridiculous. We have concluded that, just as we must improve organizational capacity before the next wave, we must also increase our capacity to think in common. Collective exercises like this document are an attempt in that direction. As we write, the tactical and strategic horizon of the Palestine solidarity movement and the broader struggle against capitalism remain woefully under-defined; instead, far too many intelligent comrades waste their days debating bourgeois electoral politics in bad faith exchanges with total strangers on social media. A reevaluation of priorities is long overdue.

Which brings us back to the fecund phraseology: “Globalize the Intifada.” Saying the phrase exceeded the content in the case of the UChicago encampment is as colossal an understatement as they come. But we understand it as a challenge. It raises the question: how can we engineer a situation where the content exceeds the phrase?

See you in the Fall!

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