

## My Fact Finding Mission to the UCLA Pro-Hamas Encampment 4/26/24

We arrived at the encampment at 2:00pm. It felt more like a county fair or carnival than a political rally. The entire central quad of the university, the most historic and iconic part of the campus, was barricaded with metal fences supplied by the UCLA administration. Small gaps in the barricade were patrolled by “bouncers”, basically thugs who were standing around forming a human chain, their faces covered in keffiyehs. One entrance was marked “Press”, and indeed there were journalists lined up awaiting permission to enter. These entrance permits were given only after a short vetting process ensured that they were not from Jewish or “unfriendly” news organizations.

“Please move out of the way, this sidewalk needs to be clear!”, a security guard announced loudly at the few Pro-Israel counter-demonstrators who gathered outside the encampment. These bicycle-mounted, blue and yellow clad men and women rode around enforcing this directive. I approached them to discuss their mission, and they agreed to talk to me off camera. Their entire mandate was to keep the two protesting groups separated so that no scuffles would break out. “So basically, you are the anti-scuffle police?” I asked them. They replied that they were a private security group hired by UCLA. They had no authority to do anything other than to keep the protestors separated; the law, and who was violating it, was not their concern. When I asked them who they reported to, they pointed to a second set of bicycle-mounted men and women. This second security detail looked far more formidable; they were clad in black, had police badges, and stood back in a supervisory role. When I approached them to conduct an interview, they also requested not to be filmed. “Are you UCPD?” I asked them. They clarified that they too were not police, but they did report directly to UCPD and were following a similar directive. “We are here to keep the crowds separated and to avoid any scuffles or other violence” they replied.

After I finished interviewing the security teams, I tried to enter the encampment through one of the “official” entrances. I was immediately met with a wall of keffiyeh-clad thugs who blocked the way. I asked them to please move aside as I am a UCLA Professor and this was a public space, but they only doubled down on their hostility. At this point, both security teams arrived at this nexus of conflict. “I am a UCLA Professor and this is a public space” I argued. These people were breaking the law and it was my right to enter this quad and see the displays that were set up, I demanded. “If you are a Professor, do you think going into the encampment is really a good idea right now?” asked the head of security. A conversation ensued, and I realized that these poor men and women had the worst job on campus. They were hired to protect these criminals and keep law abiding citizens, mainly Jews and Israel supporters, from exercising their right to freedom of movement in a public space. One could tell they were very uneasy about what they were doing. It reminded me of another era that I thought would “never happen again”.

Finally, I went to the UCPD central station about half a mile away and spoke to the officer in charge of the operation (who I will not name for his own protection). A 25 year veteran of the

force, he was a proud and honest man who had no problem giving a filmed interview. He shared his frustration with what was happening up there at the encampment, admitting that the protestors were breaking the law by setting up the encampment and excluding others from its confines. But he confided that UCPD got its directives from the administration, and their mission as of now was to not engage the protestors. They were not planning on policing any of these violations as they were mostly misdemeanors. If any felonies occurred, such as assaults, these crimes would need to be reported to them given that they were not on site to bear witness. I was left feeling totally powerless. Unlike Nazi Germany, here we had a police force that wanted to do the right thing. However, the police was subservient to UCLA's governing body, the Regents, and its executive leadership (Gene Block and Michael Beck) had decided not to intervene, leaving us Jews to fend for ourselves.