

Students oppose Trump's threat to deport international students

Our reporters
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Students and workers throughout the United States have reacted with horror and anger to Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) threats against international students studying within the US. The new measures, introduced on Monday, bar entry to or deport holders of F-1 and M-1 student visas if they are unable to attend in-person classes this fall.

The ICE announcement is part of a broader effort by the Trump administration to force the reckless reopening of schools in the fall amid the ongoing pandemic. “We’re very much going to put pressure on governors and everybody else to open the schools, to get them open,” Trump said at a forum at the White House on Tuesday. “So, we’re going to be putting a lot of pressure on: Open your schools in the fall.”

At the same time, the order, which primarily targets students holding visas from US rivals such as China, also serves to stoke xenophobia and nationalism.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the youth and student wing of the Socialist Equality Party condemns the Trump administration’s attempts to terrorize international students in the US. The IYSSE insists on the right of students, youth and workers to study wherever they choose, regardless of nationality.

Members of the IYSSE spoke to students and youth across the country, as well as many from countries around the world, who are outraged over the recent developments.

“[The Trump administration is] trying to make life impossible for immigrants, and it starts to become heavy on us. Many of my classmates and friends, just like myself, feel unwelcomed,” said Lylia, an international student from France studying in Baruch College at the City University of New York (CUNY). Lylia, who is studying journalism, has not received definite plans from CUNY about its reopening plans.

“Everything is so uncertain and over the past semester

students were shown that anything can happen overnight,” she said. Asked what would happen to her education if she were forced to leave the United States, Lylia replied that she “would probably just take the semester off,” noting that taking courses at an American university from overseas would create a six-hour time difference for her.

“We [international students] are facing this pandemic alone,” said a community college student in New York City who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals from ICE. “If I am forced to leave I will not be able to return ... because my country is in a complicated situation because of COVID-19,” they added. The student, who is from Brazil, said “I have my sponsor but he pays for my studies in the United States, not in my country. My dream of graduating and having a successful career can end.”

On Wednesday, Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration demanding it halt its effort to punish international students. “The order came down without notice—its cruelty surpassed only by its recklessness ... We believe that the ICE order is bad public policy, and we believe that it is illegal,” stated Harvard president Lawrence S. Bacow in the university newspaper. The lawsuit has been endorsed by several major universities, including Princeton.

Prior to the pandemic, international students provided a particularly lucrative source of funds for schools that relied on the high out-of-pocket fees charged to students coming from abroad.

Ravi, an international graduate student from the University of California San Diego, spoke about the motives of colleges in opposing Trump’s move. “The university has only sent us one email so far, and it’s clear they do not want this. But not because they give a damn about the students; because the universities do not want to lose out on tuition funds from international students.”

“The ... effort to deport tens of thousands of students ... would be met with opposition from students and faculty,” said Ravi, who is optimistic that the mass opposition to such measures in the working class will prevent Trump from following through on the threat. Ravi was a participant in the nearly four-month-long University of California grad student wildcat strike that was smothered by the United Auto Workers, which had filed an injunction against the striking students and sought to isolate the strike as it erupted throughout the state’s university system.

“The decision to rescind the status of F1 and M1 international students ... is extremely worrying,” said Rochelle, an international grad student from France. Rochelle believed that the order “corresponds to two strategies” of the Trump administration to “further the crackdown on immigration” and “force the universities, which financially rely on international students’ paid tuitions, to reopen.”

Rochelle drew attention to the international dimensions of these attacks, saying, “late last year for example, the French government attempted to implement a tenfold increase of the tuition paid by non-EU students in universities.”

According to the United Nations, at least 177 countries throughout the world have restricted immigration during the pandemic. In April, the Trump administration announced a 60-day halt to all immigration to the US. The administration, which has done nothing to prepare the population to cope with COVID-19, sought to stoke up images of disease-ridden foreigners as a cause for ending travel to the country.

“This hits me hard,” said Arvinder, a student at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) of the administration’s threat. “My uncle came to the United States and went to Kent State University [in Ohio]. My family wouldn’t even be in this country right now if such a policy had been used then,” he said.

“I attend the University of South Florida in Tampa and the population of international students on my campus is about 10 or 11 percent,” said Noor, who is a first-generation US citizen. “They enrich us with their culture and teach us many things we were unaware of before coming in contact with people from other countries.”

“When we all heard the news of ICE’s recent decision, my friends were informing me and expressing their stress, anger, and disappointment. A lot of them were unaware of what they were going to do, how were they going to be able to afford a flight home, or even attend live online

classes with a time difference in their home countries.” Noor passed on a link to a petition she started, calling for the defense of international students.

The anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration and the back-to-work campaign have been facilitated and supported by the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party has spent the last four years trying to channel the mass opposition to the Trump administration behind its own anti-Russia campaign, reflecting the interests of powerful factions of the military and intelligence agencies.

In response to Trump’s latest announcement, Michigan Democratic congresswoman Elissa Slotkin, a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, decried ICE’s new directives as “short-sighted.” Relying on her own brand of nationalism, Slotkin claimed the order would hurt “our nation’s security” and “competitive advantage” against Russia and China.

In opposition to this right-wing nationalist position, an international grad student in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics] at the University of Michigan said: “Any effective opposition to this policy will not come from pleading to the White House, but will only come from linking up with a broader fight against the Trump administration and the entire political establishment’s disregard for public health in their drive for making profits out of this pandemic.”

The IYSSE insists that the defense of international students must be connected to the political mobilization of the working class, independently of the Democrats and Republicans, against the financial oligarchy and the capitalist profit system. The IYSSE calls on all students and young people who wish to oppose the attack on immigrants and international students to make the decision to join the youth movement of the SEP, the **International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality** (IYSSE) and take up the fight for socialism.



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