

University of Michigan cancels student referendum on genocide in Gaza

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Several hundred University of Michigan students marched and rallied in the rain on Friday to denounce the U-M administration's arbitrary cancellation on Thursday of a student referendum vote, which had begun Tuesday and was slated to continue throughout Thursday, on a resolution urging the university to acknowledge the genocidal character of Israel's war in Gaza and divest from companies profiting from the slaughter.

The referendum had been authorized weeks before by the Central Student Government (CSG) to allow the student body to decide between two opposed resolutions that had been presented to a CSG meeting, one supporting Israel in the war and the other denouncing the war and the university's complicity in it.

The students marched past the home of U-M President Santa Ono after two students affiliated with Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), the U-M chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, addressed the crowd. The two students had been singled out for attack Thursday morning by Zionists who falsely accused them of "stealing students' email" by sending out an email urging students to vote for the anti-genocide resolution. The email had actually been endorsed by a coalition of more than 60 student organizations.

The X/Twitter post by the right-wing, pro-Israel forces featured photos of the two students, Noor Sami and Salma Hamamy. It smeared the anti-war resolution as antisemitic and demanded that the university cancel the vote and expel the students.

Shortly thereafter, the administration sent out a campus-wide message echoing the bogus charge of misuse of the campus email and using it as a pretext to cancel the vote on the resolutions, ludicrously claiming that the vote had been tainted. The message, signed by Timothy G. Lynch, vice president and general counsel, failed to explain on what authority the administration could overturn a decision of the student government.

On the contrary, Lynch's letter noted that the administration had faced "calls to block, delay, or oppose the two resolutions" prior to the beginning of voting, without naming the source of these demands, and that the CSG had opposed any delay in the vote. He pointedly wrote: "We do not know and never will know the voting results on these two resolutions."

The referendum, which was open to all undergraduate and graduate students, gave voters the option of choosing between Resolution AR-13-025, titled "University Accountability in the Face of Genocide," and Resolution AR-13-026, titled "CSG Response to Atrocities in the Middle East." The latter was a reference to the Hamas breakout and armed incursion into southern Israel on October 7, not the war of annihilation and ethnic cleansing Israel and the US have been carrying out ever since.

Resolution AR 13-025 urged the university to "recognize the millions of people undergoing genocide in Gaza as we speak," "acknowledge that 75+ years of Palestinian-Israeli tensions have been created through systems of settler colonialism," and "investigate their (U-M's) investments in any apartheid regime in the world."

There is little doubt that the real reason the university shut down the vote was its fear that the pro-Palestinian, anti-genocide resolution would win, or at the very least receive thousands of votes. At Friday's rally, Noor Sami announced that over 10,000 students had already voted in the referendum when the university announced it would not count the votes, an indication of the deep and broad outrage over the mass murder being carried out against Palestinian civilians, in most cases women and children.

The forces lined up against the vote included the Biden administration and both capitalist parties. U-M's thuggish action took place one day after Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, known informally as the "senator from Wall Street," took to the Senate floor to denounce

students protesting against the genocide in Gaza as antisemites.

One would have to add the Department of Defense and the CIA, with which the university is closely integrated, and the Democratic Party figures and corporate moguls who dominate the Board of Regents, not to mention the university's donor base. That the right-wing Zionist lobby was deeply involved was confirmed by the social media post of Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, who congratulated the university for making "the right decision" and libeled supporters of the anti-genocide resolution as antisemites.

The claim that the pro-Palestinian coalition's email was "unauthorized" has already been refuted. It has been demonstrated that a campus-wide email could not be sent out without going through the registrar's office and without the approval and processing of its content by university staff.

On Friday, the student coalition supporting Resolution AR-13-025 issued an online statement denouncing "the utter degradation to our campus democratic proceedings" and the "decision by the university administration to silence the voices of their students..."

The statement continued:

Not only does the University's decision to cancel this referendum demonstrate that they are willing to sacrifice the democratic desires of their student body to appease the interests of their donors, it clearly conveys that the administration has no regard for student safety. They issued an email with intentionally false accusations against us, but they have yet to address the harmful and violent doxing of their own students.

The student government likewise denounced the university's action. It stated:

CSG reaffirms its support for the students who thus far had courageously expressed their opinion and engaged in our democratic process with regards to these two ballot measures. The decision to deny students a forum to voice their opinions on these questions goes against our governing documents and our morals as student leaders. For these reasons, CSG declined to remove the

questions from the ballot.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at U-M campaigned for a "yes" vote on AR-13-025 and denounced the cancellation of the vote by the administration. As we said in a statement supporting the resolution and the global protests against the war in Gaza:

The "yes" vote on this resolution will be a powerful demonstration of opposition to this imperialist-backed atrocity. It will strengthen the opposition to war among students, workers and young people nationally and internationally.

At the same time, we have explained that protests alone cannot stop the genocide in Gaza or the broader world war being unleashed by US imperialism, which has already opened up fronts in the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and now the widening war in the Middle East. The root cause of war, poverty and fascism is the bankrupt capitalist system.

It is not a matter of trying to pressure the governments of war criminals that are carrying out these atrocities, but of mobilizing the united social and international power of the working class to remove them and replace them with workers' governments armed with a socialist program.

We urge students to attend the public meeting of the IYSSE at U-M on Tuesday, December 5 to discuss the historical and social roots of the present crisis and a socialist and internationalist strategy for working people and youth. The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. in Room D (third floor) of Michigan League.



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