

University of Michigan permanently bans student resolution against genocide in Gaza

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On December 5, University of Michigan (U-M) President Santa Ono sent an email to the entire student body and faculty justifying his earlier shutdown of a campus referendum authorized by the student government on a resolution denouncing the US/Israeli war on Gaza as genocide.

But Ono did not stop there. He declared that the university would never allow a vote on any such resolution in the future.

At the end of October, the Central Student Government (CSG) at U-M authorized a referendum on two competing resolutions concerning the war in Gaza. One supported Israel and the other urged the university to acknowledge the genocidal character of the Israeli war and divest from pro-Israel companies.

The vote was to take place online over three days, beginning on Tuesday, November 28 and concluding on November 30. The turnout for the referendum was unprecedented. By the time the university administration announced on the afternoon of Thursday, November 30 that it was disallowing the referendum and would not reveal the vote totals to that point, more than 10,000 students had already cast ballots.

Prior to November 28, right-wing and Zionist groups had demanded that the administration delay or cancel the vote outright, branding the anti-genocide resolution as “antisemitic.” In reality, they were fearful, with good cause, that the pro-Palestinian and anti-mass murder resolution would pass, reflecting the lopsided opposition among students and some faculty to the bloody drive to kill as many Palestinians in Gaza as possible and drive the survivors into the Sinai Desert.

The university decided, however, to allow the vote to proceed, no doubt constrained by the absence of any antisemitic incidents on campus, the participation of many Jewish U-M students in anti-Gaza war protests, and the fact that the vote had been authorized by the student government.

However, on Thursday morning, November 30, a Zionist group publicly posted the names and photos of two students active in the coalition of campus organizations promoting the anti-genocide resolution. In a clear incitement to violence against the two students, the post smeared the referendum as “antisemitic” and demanded that it be halted and that the students be expelled.

The Zionists claimed that an email sent out to all undergraduate students on Wednesday by a coalition of more than 60 campus groups urging a “yes” vote on the anti-genocide resolution violated university procedures, and that the two students they had doxxed had “hijacked” students’ email addresses.

Instead of condemning the Zionists’ incitement against pro-Palestinian students, the university administration seized on their false charges of improper use of campus email as a pretext to disallow the referendum. Late in the afternoon of Thursday, November 30, U-M Vice President and General Counsel Timothy G. Lynch issued a statement declaring that the mass email had “irreparably tainted the voting process on the two resolutions,” and constituted a “threat to the integrity of the election results.” The university, he claimed, had “no choice” but to disallow the referendum and conceal the results of the vote.

The “improper” email canard was quickly exposed as a lie. University staff declared that they had approved the email and processed it, and the student government (CSG) affirmed that the email did not violate any student government campaign rules.

The arbitrary shutdown of the vote and the threats against the two doxxed students sparked angry campus protests. Hundreds rallied and marched in the rain past the home of President Santa Ono on Friday, December 1. The student coalition against the Gaza war has drafted another resolution demanding that the CSG launch an investigation into the cancellation of the referendum and the doxxing of students by Zionist groups.

This is the context within which President Ono issued his December 5 statement. It is an example of cynicism, dishonesty and double-talk.

Ono begins by acknowledging that the allegations against the two targeted students are false. He writes that the two students “have faced angry calls for their expulsion, hateful intimidation and physical threats,” and declares that “this has to stop.”

Thus Ono retracts the entire justification he used just five days before to quash the vote on the student government resolutions. What logically follows from this admission is an announcement either that the university will release the results of the vote on the resolutions, or it will hold a new vote.

But what follows in Ono’s email is the exact opposite. He writes: “The issues raised by the ongoing violence in the Middle East are ripping our community apart, pitting one group against another and engendering very real fears about safety and security on our campus...”

“The proposed resolutions have done more to stoke fear, anger and animosity on our campus than they would ever accomplish as recommendations to the university.”

He then concludes:

“After great thought and input, one significant step we are taking

is to disallow any future votes on two controversial and divisive Central Student Government resolutions—AR 13-025 and AR 13-026—related to ongoing violence in Israel and Gaza.”

In other words: “Big Brother will not let you vote on a resolution he does not approve of.” This means the end of free speech rights at the University of Michigan.

What is really behind the suppression of the anti-genocide resolution is the fact that it was headed for victory, something the billionaire donors and regents, Democratic and Republican politicians (from Biden on down), and Pentagon, CIA and State Department officials who collectively run the university would not allow.

A “yes” vote on the anti-genocide resolution by the student body at a prestigious university like U-M would deal a significant blow to the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Biden administration and its imperialist allies, and would encourage similar referendums and protests at universities not only in the US, but internationally. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at U-M issued a statement calling for a “yes” vote on the anti-war resolution and intervened during the voting to fight for its passage.

This is precisely why Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, issued a public statement congratulating U-M for making “the right decision” and denounced the anti-genocide resolution as antisemitic the day after the vote was suppressed.

In his December 5 email, Ono writes that his decision to permanently disallow student resolutions against the US/Israeli war in Gaza was made “after great thought and input.”

Input from whom? Not from the CSG, which explicitly opposed all attempts to block the vote and bitterly denounced the university’s “decision to deny students a forum to voice their opinions.”

The fact that seven members of the Board of Regents signed Ono’s statement provides an indication of the source of Ono’s “input.” The signatories include:

* Jordon Acker, a Democrat who expanded anti-democratic and repressive programs during his tenure in the US Department of Homeland Security during the Obama administration. He was involved in expedited deportations of immigrants and the further militarization of the US-Mexico border.

* Denise Ilitch: a Democrat from the second-richest family in Michigan. The Ilitches own Little Caesar Pizza Enterprises, the Detroit Red Wings, the Detroit Tigers and Olympia Entertainment. Mike Ilitch was involved in the forced bankruptcy of Detroit in 2013 and the slashing of public-sector pensions and jobs.

*Ron Weiser: a two-time chairman of the Michigan Republican Party and one of the richest individuals in the state of Michigan. He led the Republican National Committee’s fundraising for Donald Trump in 2016 and is behind the Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies (WECD), which spearheads right-wing campaigns by hosting anti-communist scholars in and around the US State Department.

These developments at U-M are part of a broader McCarthyite crackdown on mass opposition on college campuses to the imperialist-backed atrocities in Gaza. This includes the escalating campaign by the entire political establishment and mainstream

media to libel opposition to genocide of Palestinians as antisemitism, and on that specious basis destroy the right to free speech and political expression at colleges and high schools.

U-M joined in this hysteria by stating on Twitter/X on December 8: “In the context of the national discourse, the University of Michigan unequivocally condemns calls for the genocide of Jews or any other peoples as this is antithetical to our values.”

What calls for genocide against the Jewish people? Not a single example of such “calls” is cited because there are none to cite. There is only the filthy identification of calls to halt the real and ongoing genocide against Palestinians with genocide against Jews.

U-M’s suppression of student opposition to the US/Israeli slaughter in Gaza is of a piece with its support for the McCarthyite witch hunt based on concocted charges of antisemitism on college campuses.

The only way to stop the genocide in Gaza and defend democratic rights at home is to turn to the working class and fuse its expanding struggles against inflation, speedup, inequality and exploitation with the growing global movement against imperialist war and genocide.

At the moment, 420,000 Quebec public-sector workers are on a province-wide strike, joining more than 65,000 elementary and high school teachers who have already been on an unlimited strike for more than two weeks. Airport workers in Belgium, port workers in Spain and protesters at the Port of Tacoma and a Missouri Boeing plant answered the calls by Palestinian trade unions and refused to handle freight and arms to Israel.

This is the social force students and young people must turn to in their fight against war, genocide and dictatorship. Join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) to build a global anti-war movement based on the mobilization of the working class against capitalism and for socialism!



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