

Faculty Senate calls on University of Michigan to divest from firms aiding Israeli genocide

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On January 29, the Faculty Senate of the University of Michigan (U-M) approved a resolution calling on the university to cut its financial ties with companies involved in the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The resolution cites evidence from the Gaza Ministry of Health, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that documents the horrific loss of civilian lives in Gaza and the United States' shared responsibility with the Israeli state for the mass slaughter of defenseless Palestinians.

The Faculty Senate resolution calls on the university leadership to “divest from its financial holdings in companies that invest in Israel’s ongoing military campaign in Gaza.” The final section of the resolution emphasizes that the call for divestment “is not a request to end support, academically or financially, for any of U-M’s partnerships with Israeli colleges or universities...”

The resolution passed by a vote of 38-17, with five abstentions. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan supports the principled stand taken by the Faculty Senate.

It is an expression of the breadth and depth of opposition among workers, students, educators and faculty members in the US and internationally to the mass murder and ethnic cleansing being carried out by the fascist Netanyahu regime, with the indispensable and full support of the Biden administration and all of the imperialist powers.

The vote is all the more significant in the context of the bipartisan witch-hunt against students, professors and campus workers involved in protests against the US-Israeli genocide, including police attacks on peaceful demonstrators and efforts to criminalize and ban campus organizations that defend the Palestinian people and oppose the Zionist apartheid state. They—as well as artists, musicians, actors, authors and others in public life who speak out against the genocide—are being libeled with the vile and false accusation of “antisemitism.”

The U-M administration has joined the attack on free speech, publicly denounced by the ACLU of Michigan as “McCarthyite,” by calling out the police to arrest peaceful protesters and shutting down the referendum organized by the student government on resolutions on Gaza, including one calling on the university to acknowledge that the Gaza war is a “genocide” and divest from corporations tied to the Israeli regime.

The Faculty Senate vote was in direct defiance of the administration’s repressive campaign. This was crystal clear at the Faculty Senate meeting that voted for the resolution. Speaking on behalf of U-M President Santa Ono and the Board of Regents, U-M Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Geoffrey Chatas spoke against the divestment resolution, saying:

It has been the university’s unwavering policy to shield the endowment from political pressures and to base its investment decisions on financial factors such as risk and return and applicable law.

In other words, “Cash Über Alles,” genocide notwithstanding.

To support the humane and democratic spirit of the faculty resolution requires that it not be used to promote illusions that the governments, universities, political parties and other official institutions such as the UN that uphold the world capitalist system can be forced by pressure from below to halt the genocide and end the decades-long oppression of the Palestinian masses.

It would be a disastrous mistake to believe that simply passing more such resolutions and making more appeals to the powers that be will either stop the mass murder in Gaza or halt the rapidly expanding US-led war that is engulfing the Middle East.

All attempts by phony “progressive” politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to peddle the notion that pressure from below can shift the war-mongering policies of Biden, the Democratic Party and the openly fascist Republican Party are a deadly trap designed to paralyze and dissipate the mass opposition. The same applies to the illusions promoted by fake socialist groups (the Democratic Socialists of America, Left Voice) and by the pro-war, pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies—such as the apparatuses that run the American Federation of Teachers and the United Auto Workers.

There have already been four months of mass global demonstrations against the Zionist-imperialist mass murder. The IYSSE supports, participates in and calls for the expansion of these protests. But to be effective, the mass opposition must be guided by a political perspective that is based on the realities of the unprecedented global crisis of the capitalist system. This system

seeks to resolve its contradictions—between social needs and ever greater wealth concentration in a parasitic oligarchy, and between the nation-state and the global integration of economic life—by plunging the world into the barbarism of war, genocide, mass poverty and fascism.

The official response to the worldwide wave of mass protest has been: More genocide in Gaza, an ever-widening war in the Middle East that now targets Iran, escalation of the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, and repression, intimidation, lies and slander within the US and its imperialist allies against the popular opposition. This is joined with an intensifying assault on the jobs and living standards of the working class, with mass layoffs of autoworkers, UPS workers and other sections of the working class.

As for the United Nations, South Africa brought a devastating and incontrovertible case to the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide. The UN court called the case “plausible” (as opposed to the White House, which called it “meritless”) but then refused even to demand that Israel carry out a ceasefire.

Within hours of the UN ruling, the US and the other major imperialist backers of Israel defunded the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East (UNRWA), ensuring the mass starvation of the Palestinians, not only in Gaza but in refugee camps across the Middle East. Then the US and UK began bombing Yemen, and now the US is bombing Iraq and Syria and is preparing to bomb Iran.

In the US, Biden and the Democrats have adopted the fascist refugee policy of Trump and the Republicans in a bid to win Republican votes for tens of billions more for the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the “final solution” of the “Palestinian problem” in Gaza, and the transformation of Taiwan into a platform for war against mainland China.

Conclusions must be drawn! Mass layoffs are compelling millions of workers in the US and around the world to expand their struggles. This is the social force to which students and youth must turn to halt the descent into capitalist world war and barbarism. The same contradictions that threaten mankind with destruction in nuclear war, a climate catastrophe, genocide and fascism drive masses of workers all over the world into struggle against capitalism, creating the objective conditions for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of world socialism.

World War III, whose initial stages we are already witnessing, as well as fascism, oligarchy and mass poverty can only be stopped by going to the root of the problem—the bankruptcy of the world capitalist system.

In the 2024 US elections, there is no “lesser evil.” The choice between the war criminal Biden and the fascist Trump is no choice at all.

We repeat: It is necessary to mobilize the only social force that can put an end to war, genocide, fascism and oligarchy by putting an end to their source—capitalism—and establishing international socialism. That force is the American and international working class.

The IYSSE has been holding anti-genocide/anti-war rallies at auto plants, where our message receives an overwhelmingly positive response. The working class opposes the genocide in

Gaza, and the working class does not want war. But just as students are being silenced and intimidated by university administrations, workers’ voices are shut out by the union bureaucracies.

Last week, without so much as taking a poll of the workers, UAW President Shawn Fain gave “Genocide Joe” Biden a full endorsement, telling the president that the union was prepared “to go to war” for him. The American Federation of Teachers’ millionaire president, Randi Weingarten, is likewise campaigning for the war criminal Joe Biden.

That is why the IYSSE, the youth movement of the Trotskyist International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party in the US, supports the building of a global network of workers’ rank-and-file committees, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to abolish the union bureaucracies and return power to the rank-and-file workers on the shop floor.

We must build a mass, socialist anti-war movement based on the working class, not to “pressure” governments but to overthrow them and replace them with governments of, by and for the working class, the vast majority of humanity. That means fighting for an international political general strike against genocide and war. It means abolishing the pro-war union bureaucracies and building the new socialist leadership in the working class. That is the fight of the IYSSE. Join us today!

The IYSSE at U-M is holding a public meeting tonight titled: “The Global Fight Against Israel’s Genocide in Gaza: The Way Forward”

Thursday, February 8, 7:00 p.m. ET

University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

East Quadrangle, Room #1405

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