

University of Michigan student government to investigate administration's shutdown of referendum on Gaza genocide

Luke Galvin, Barry Grey
21 February 2024

On February 6, the Central Student Government (CSG) at the University of Michigan voted to launch an investigation into the U-M administration's halting last November of a campus-wide referendum which the CSG had authorized on two competing resolutions concerning the Israeli war on Gaza.

One of the resolutions, drawn up by Zionist supporters of Israel, defended the mass slaughter of Palestinians by the Israeli military; the other called on the university to acknowledge that Israel was engaged in genocide against defenseless Palestinian civilians and to divest from companies implicated in the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian enclave.

The CSG authorized the referendum last October, with voting on the rival resolutions to take place in conjunction with student government elections conducted online last November 28 through November 30. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at U-M distributed a leaflet calling for a "yes" vote on the anti-genocide, pro-Palestinian resolution.

On November 30, only hours before the official end of voting and with a record 10,000 ballots having already been cast, U-M Vice President and General Counsel Timothy G. Lynch issued a statement announcing that the university was disallowing the referendum on the Gaza resolutions and would not reveal the results to that point of the vote. Lynch cited as the pretext for the unilateral and anti-democratic suppression of the vote a mass email sent out the previous day by supporters of the anti-genocide resolution, which had been falsely denounced by Zionist forces as an improper use of the campus email system.

The real reason for the ham-fisted action was the administration's realization that the anti-Zionist, anti-genocide resolution was headed for victory, which would have delivered a significant political blow to the campaign of propaganda and lies mounted by both the Israeli government and the US government and media in support of the bombing and starving of Palestinian men, women and children.

A few days later, on December 5, U-M President Santa Ono issued a public letter acknowledging that there was nothing improper about the email sent out by supporters of the anti-genocide resolution, thereby undercutting the entire rationale advanced by the university for shutting down the referendum. Nevertheless, Ono upheld the disallowing of the referendum and announced a permanent ban on any such vote on the Gaza war in the future.

The CSG at the time denounced the shutting down of the referendum on Gaza, making clear that it had no role in the attack on free speech and political expression.

The resolution passed by the CSG on February 6 resolves to elect an Inspector General to lead an investigation based on a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to be filed by the student government. The CSG plans to compile weekly reports and issue a final public report at the conclusion of its investigation.

The move by the CSG reflects the continuing anger and disgust among students and sections of university faculty and staff, along with working people all around the world, over the Nazi-like mass killing of Palestinians, carried out with the full and active support of the US Biden administration and allied imperialist governments.

Just this week the US once again vetoed a cease-fire resolution in the UN Security Council, even as Israel prepared to attack Rafah in southern Gaza where a million Palestinian survivors of carpet bombing, executions, starvation and homelessness have been forced to flee.

The mass anger has been intensified by the nationwide effort of both capitalist parties—Democrats and Republicans—the corporate-controlled media, and university donors and governing boards to criminalize campus opposition to the bloodbath in Gaza and expanding US war in the Middle East and smear it as “antisemitic.”

In December, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan issued a public protest against U-M for cancelling the Gaza resolution, arresting peaceful student protesters and carrying out other acts of intimidation. The ACLU linked the U-M’s repressive policies to what it called “McCarthyite” attacks on campuses across the US, including the forced resignations of the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania.

On January 29, the U-M Faculty Senate 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.

As the WSWS wrote in response to the U-M Faculty Senate resolution:

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...

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...

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...

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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact