

University of Michigan retaliates against student protesters as over 3,200 back referendum calling for divestment from Israel

Kevin Reed
31 March 2024

The University of Michigan (U-M) has summarily implemented its new repressive “anti-disruption” policy in advance of the officially announced feedback deadline of April 3, handing out trespassing tickets to students and banning them from school facilities.

According to an article in *The Michigan Daily* on Friday, Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE) reported that three students were served citations Thursday morning by police in Ann Arbor “for trespassing at the 101st Honor Convocation when a protest disrupted the event at Hill Auditorium Sunday.”

The tickets were handed out as more than 100 students protested outside a meeting of the U-M Board of Regents on Thursday morning to demand the university divest from companies linked to Israel and the genocide being carried out in Gaza. According to some students, the Board of Regents moved its meeting up to 9:00 am from the normal 4:00 pm starting time to avoid the protesters.

The new “disruptive activity policy,” which threatens the expulsion of students and termination of faculty and staff for actions deemed disruptive to “normal celebrations, activities, and operations of the University,” was in response to the abrupt shutdown of the Honors Convocation held March 24 at Hill Auditorium. Students in attendance held up signs and shouted slogans against the US/Israeli mass murder in Gaza and the complicity of the university during a speech by U-M President Santa Ono.

When the protesting students assembled outside the Alexander G. Ruthven Building on Thursday morning, March 28, they were confronted by 13 state police officers and barricades with flyers on them that had QR

codes linking to the “Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities,” the “Standard Practice Guide” and the Michigan State Trespass Law.

In an anonymous interview with the *Daily*, one student reported having received a ticket Thursday morning stating the student was banned from five campus buildings. The student said, “I never received a warning. I was blindsided by this ticket. ... While I was walking with my friend, a police officer grabbed me and informed me that I was banned from five university buildings.”

A video posted to Twitter/X by the pro-Palestinian TAHRIR Coalition at U-M shows University of Michigan police officer T. Cargill serving a ticket to a student and saying, “This is from the Hill Auditorium incident, Okay. Same thing, Ruthven, Hill Auditorium, Rackham, Michigan Stadium and Chrysler Arena. You are not allowed to go there.”

The student then asks, “So, I can’t go to my own graduation?”, to which the officer replies, “There is a way to appeal that, Okay. You can contact and I believe we’ll make arrangements for that, Okay?”

According to information published on the U-M Division of Public Safety and Security website, Detective Thomas Cargill is a member of the Computer Forensics team for the university’s Criminal Investigation Unit.

The Board of Regents proceeded with its March 28 meeting and went out of its way to officially reject any divestment of holdings in the university’s \$17.9 billion endowment. Refusing to directly address the students’ demand for divestment from Israel, Regent Sarah Hubbard said, “We will continue to shield the endowment from political pressures and base our

investment decisions on financial factors such as risk and return.”

The university’s undemocratic “anti-disruption” policy and its intransigent rejection of protesters’ demands takes place in the face of broad and mounting opposition on campus to the US/Israeli genocide.

On Thursday afternoon, more than 1,000 students and supporters rallied to demand divestment and the dropping of charges against 40 students arrested last November for staging a peaceful sit-in at the Ruthven Building. The students were also demonstrating against President Ono’s attack on their first amendment rights through the imposition of an “anti-disruption” policy that essentially criminalizes any action deemed by the administration to disrupt normal operations. Since the policy statement explicitly applies to faculty and staff as well as students, it could very well be used to ban picketing by striking university employees.

This mass student opposition was shown in the results of a referendum organized by the TAHRIR coalition on a resolution calling for divestment from Israel and the dropping of charges against student protesters. It was also demonstrated in the results of student government elections, held last week.

Four months after President Ono unilaterally disallowed a referendum called by the student government demanding that the university acknowledge the genocidal character of the Gaza onslaught and divest from Israel, 3,204 students and other university members—99 percent of all those who participated in the referendum—voted for the Gaza anti-genocide resolution.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at U-M participated in the mass protest on March 28 and distributed a statement denouncing the university crackdown on protesters, calling for their defense and the dropping of all charges against them, and supporting a “yes” vote in the referendum. The presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the Socialist Equality Party in the 2024 US elections, Joseph Kishore and Jerry White, spoke to students and explained their socialist strategy against genocide, war and repression.

In the student government elections, TAHRIR-backed candidates were elected president and vice-president and their slate won 22 out of 45 seats in the student assembly.

The hard-line, repressive position of the administration in response to overwhelming opposition among students and much of the faculty and staff to the genocidal war in Gaza underscores the fact that the university will not be pressured into changing its policies.

This brings into stark relief the need for a new perspective and strategy for the movement among workers and young people internationally against genocide, the escalating imperialist war against Russia over Ukraine, and US war preparations against China, of which the protests at U-M are a part.

As explained by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at U-M, the genocide in Gaza is one front in a global war spearheaded by US imperialism for a redivision of the world, which, if not stopped by a mass revolutionary movement against capitalism based in the working class, will lead to the nuclear annihilation of the planet.

The University of Michigan is part of this system and the much greater network of war, inequality, repression and criminality. The protests in the US and around the world must be consciously directed, not at putting pressure on the existing governments and political parties of the capitalist class in the futile hope of shifting their policies, but at overturning them and establishing workers’ power and socialism.

In the US, this is a fight against the Biden administration and the Democratic Party, no less than Trump’s fascistic Republicans. In fact, the U-M administration and regents are linked far more closely to the Democratic Party than to the Republicans.

The crackdown on student opposition is taking place across the US, by both big business parties, and in countries around the world. Students must turn to the working class and fight for its independent political mobilization against capitalist war and repression, on the basis of a socialist program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact