

Momodou Taal wins case against Cornell University

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In a significant victory for democratic rights, international graduate student and instructor Momodou Taal announced on Thursday morning that Cornell University has backed down on the terms of his suspension and he will therefore not be removed from the US by immigration officials.

Taal posted a statement on Twitter/X on Thursday which thanked supporters for the campaign in his defense and said,

Cornell University has decided to allow me to remain an enrolled student, which will allow me to keep my visa and submit my thesis. This is drastic shift from their position just 2 weeks ago, in which they were determined to see me removed from the US. We also know that there are several outside forces who are applying pressure to ensure my removal but we have prevailed thanks to all those who wrote in, signed the petition and applied pressure.

The failed effort by the Cornell University administration to revoke the visa of the British-Gambian grad student was a thoroughly undemocratic attack on his free speech rights. It stemmed from his participation in a campus protest on September 18 against the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza on campus. If it had been successful, Taal would have had to leave the country because his F-1 visa status would have been revoked.

On the day of the protest, more than 100 pro-Palestinian students and supporters rallied outside of Day Hall before marching to the Statler Hotel where a career fair sponsored by the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations was being held. The protesters entered the hotel and effectively shut down the event with chants against the participation of defense contractors Boeing and L3Harris, two companies that students voted last April in a referendum that the university must divest from for “supporting the ongoing war in Gaza.”

Taal was present and delivered a speech at the rally and briefly participated in the demonstration at the Statler Hotel before leaving. He was targeted for his outspoken opposition to the ongoing war crimes committed by the US government in

collaboration with the Israeli military against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

In violation of Cornell University’s code of conduct procedures, the administration called Taal to a meeting on September 23 at Day Hall and presented him with a no-trespass order banning him from entering the campus based on a complaint that accused him of “escalating, egregious behavior and a disregard for the University policies.” He was not given the opportunity to respond to the charges and was immediately suspended.

After Taal took to social media to oppose his victimization, a groundswell of support emerged on campus and across the country as students and faculty protested, online petitions were signed and letters sent to the administration demanding that his suspension be rescinded.

At first, after he filed a formal appeal of his suspension, Taal was notified by the Vice President of Student and Campus Life that his request was rejected. In response, Taal posted on Twitter/X, “This demonstrates once again that my ability to stay in this country is being hastily handled without due process in a continued attempt to silence me.” The rejection of his appeal also emboldened the movement in his defense and expanded the number of individuals and organizations around the country demanding the suspension be lifted.

In his announcement on Thursday morning, Taal explained that he still faces restrictions and that the attack on him by the administration, which is aimed at silencing opposition among students to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza, will not succeed. He wrote,

Now going forward: There are still some lesser restrictions that I will continue to fight to remove, but I no longer must do so under threat of immediate removal from the country. The struggle continues, but for now I will take this win and hope it serves as a reminder that you can fight back against these institutions.

I have no regrets. There will never come a time where I say to myself that I went too hard for Gaza. We still haven’t done near enough to stop the genocide.

It’s always and forever Free Palestine.

A central part of the campaign to defend Momodou Taal was mounted by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Party, which recognized the connection between the attack on him by Cornell University and the broader assault on democratic rights on campuses across the US and around the world.

In a video interview hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* on October 5, Taal and his attorney Eric Lee spoke about the significance of the fight to defeat the effort by Cornell University to suspend him, which is backed by the both Democrats and Republicans who have launched a right-wing campaign against peaceful protests and opposition to the US-backed Israeli onslaught on Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

In response to Taal's announcement, Lee said,

It has been an honor to represent Momodou in this fight for free speech. Cornell's administration attempted to set a dangerous precedent by collaborating with DHS to revoke a student's visa without due process, and they failed. The threat against Momodou has lifted for now, but a nationwide effort is underway at campuses across America to intimidate speech. Dozens of students, immigrant and non-immigrant alike, are fighting arrest and suspension at the University of Michigan, University of California, and more.

This case is not only about Momodou's rights, it is about your rights, too. It is about your right to hear the views Momodou espouses, your right to engage in discussion with him and people like him, your right to speak your mind. It is a lesson: Do not allow powerful forces to undermine the presumption of innocence and right to due process. What this case has shown is that the way to fight censorship is more speech from the most people.

Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president, Joseph Kishore, issued a statement saying,

As the Socialist Equality Party candidate for president, I welcome the victory of Cornell University student Momodou Taal, who will now be allowed to remain enrolled, keep his visa, and complete his thesis. Though there remain restrictions on his activity that must be opposed, Cornell was forced to reverse its earlier threats to suspend Taal and have him deported due to the outpouring of opposition from students, faculty and workers on campus, and broader opposition

throughout the US and internationally.

Taal's struggle is part of a broader fight against the efforts to silence opposition to Israel's ongoing war crimes in Gaza and the imperialist war drive of the United States. Campuses have opened in the fall amidst a police state atmosphere, including violent attacks on demonstrators at University of Michigan and moves to suppress free speech and shut down protests nationwide.

In his statement, Taal declares that "there will never come a time where I say to myself that I went too hard for Gaza." He has always stressed that the basic issue is the fight against the genocide in Gaza, which is now being expanded into the bombardment of Lebanon and a broader war throughout the Middle East.

The SEP campaign stands fully in solidarity with Taal and all those who are taking a stand against genocide and war, backed by the Democrats and Republicans. The fight to defend democratic rights must be expanded and deepened, and the SEP calls on workers and students to join this struggle and build a powerful, independent political movement in defense of democratic rights and against war and capitalism.

While the withdrawal of Taal's suspension is an important victory, the campaign against war and in defense of democratic rights must continue and be intensified. The threat of wider and more catastrophic imperialist wars, the assault on free speech rights and the descent into authoritarian dictatorship remains. Only the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program can bring a historically progressive solution to the crisis of capitalism.



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