

MIT suspends student and bans magazine for article opposing Gaza genocide

Chase Lawrence
8 November 2024

Last Friday, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) issued an immediate “interim” suspension of graduate student Prahlad Iyengar for penning an article titled “On Pacifism” in an MIT student magazine, *Written Revolution*, opposing Israel’s genocide against the people of Gaza. The publication itself has been banned from campus.

Zionist groups and the MIT administration have falsely claimed the article incites violence and have attempted to paint Iyengar as a terrorist. The article, which appeared in the fifth edition of the magazine, which is an American Sociological Association-recognized publication, does nothing of the sort as is obvious from the text of the article itself which is academic in character.

The *World Socialist Web Site* opposes this flagrant attack on free speech and academic freedom and calls on workers, students and youth to demand the immediate rescinding of all administrative measures against Iyengar.

As Iyengar wrote in a statement opposing the ban, “The administration has also banned *Written Revolution* outright, meaning students who disseminate or read this publication on campus may face discipline.” Some students reading the magazine were approached by the police. According to a recording of the call made to police, it was to stop the handing out “banned pamphlets.” Students face Orwellian disciplinary actions for distributing or merely reading the article on campus.

In an interview with the WSWs Iyengar stated “This is an attack on very many different fronts. The question I have is ‘where does it end?’ The Zionists designate all sorts of people as terrorists, including UNRWA. Are they going to categorize UN members as terrorists? Poets as terrorists? MIT by banning me from campus has banned any sort of academic debate.”

The suspension and ban represent an escalation of the bipartisan campaign led by the Biden administration and Democratic Party against opposition on the campuses to the Gaza genocide. It takes place after over 186,000 people in Gaza have been massacred by Israel, according to an estimate by *The Lancet* from July. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has warned that everyone in northern Gaza “is at imminent risk of dying,” while there is a massive and unprecedented amount of photographic and video evidence both from the victims and killers themselves on social media documenting the genocide, which could correctly be described as the first live-streamed genocide in history.

Iyengar, a second-year electrical engineering Ph.D. student, was summarily banned from campus under the bogus justification that he presented an immediate risk of violence, with the administration falsely claiming his article supports “terrorism.” This was done solely on the basis of anonymous allegations by Zionist students’ claims that statements in the article “could be interpreted as a call for more violent or destructive forms of protest at MIT.” The rule for interim banning of students is ostensibly aimed only at those who actually present a risk of violence, like those suspected of rape, murder or assault. This is clearly not the case.

Essentially no evidence has been presented beyond a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) poster being used as an illustration in Iyengar’s article. The administration falsely used this to claim that the article supported terrorism. The banning opens a veritable Pandora’s Box of avenues for censorship, meaning all manner of media from textbooks and dictionaries which have pictures of real or supposed “terrorist” organizations to documentaries and non-fiction books and even news articles in the mainstream press could be banned.

In a strong statement denouncing the ban available here, Iyengar writes:

These extraordinary actions should concern everyone on campus. My article, which I encourage everyone to read at writtenrevolution.com, attempts a historical review of the type of tactics used by protest movements throughout history, from the civil rights movement to the struggle to the fight against South African Apartheid here on MIT campus. The article addresses the academic author Ward Churchill’s famous essay, “Pacifism as Pathology,” and responds to those who embrace pacifism as an end in itself, which intellectually undermines the Palestinian right under Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions to fight back against the oppression they confront.

Iyengar points out that such themes are already addressed by MIT’s History Department, as well as in the campus student newspaper and are the subject of legitimate debate, and that if one were to use the same standards of banning “terrorism,” that this could be used against anyone accused of it by Israel, including members of the UN, Palestinian poets and academics and others.

MIT has made other attacks on academic freedom, such as preventing tenured Professor of Linguistics Michel DeGraff from teaching a course about the language used surrounding the Gaza genocide. DeGraff received letters of reprimand and a pay freeze in response to his request to teach this class.

The treatment of anti-genocide protesters stands in contrast to MIT’s treatment of Zionist students, which exposes a double standard.

Iyengar, who was previously evicted from student housing for sending an email on a non-violent protest, told the WSWs that he has filed harassment reports against some Zionist students and staff, who have slandered him on the social media website X calling him a “school shooter” and falsely claimed he is an affiliate of the PFLP, which is designated a terrorist organization by the United States government. Nothing came of any of these reports.

“MIT officials have no qualms about Zionists at MIT attacking us or advocating violence, calling for us to be raped, blasting genocide pop songs like ‘Harbu Darbu’, or meeting with the criminal Netanyahu,” Iyengar told the WSWs.

Zionists at MIT are also implicated in violent assaults on villages and some thousands of years old, are being entirely obliterated by the genocidal Israeli regime which seeks to erase Arab history.

which they have faced no repercussions legally, academically or otherwise. This follows a similar trend on other campuses, such as at Columbia University as well as at universities in Canada.

The ban on Iyengar was carried out without any due process. As he explained to the WSWS, “They banned me from campus without hearing my side of the story, without hearing my defense at all.”

The campaign against Iyengar on campus is being directed by Dean of Student Life David Randall, who is also on the board of MIT’s Hillel organization, which is playing a leading role in the witch-hunt of anti-genocide activists. Hillel International’s own website accepts Israel’s reactionary definition of “antisemitism” as including those who politically oppose Zionism.

There are also extensive commercial connections between MIT and the Israeli Ministry of Defense, the former of which has developed much of the drone technology used by the latter. The Israeli military company Elbit Systems is part of the industrial liaison system at MIT, and multiple professors take money from the Ministry of Defense.

Pointing to these connections in discussion with the WSWS, Iyengar noted, “Within 3 weeks after October 7 there was a company, Skydio, launched basically from a professor’s lab, sent 100 surveillance drones to the IDF. The capability of those drones was developed at MIT.”

MIT has hypocritically said that cutting research ties with the Israeli military would “violate academic freedom.”

The attack on Iyengar is clearly a political frame-up directed by powerful political forces, including Zionist organizations as well as the Democratic Party, which controls the administration, with Randall even admitting that he had not read the article carefully.

The action, in addition to violating Iyengar and all MIT students’ and professors’ First Amendment right to freedom of speech, has effectively deprived Iyengar of his access to his lab, as well as barring him from participation in courses and may prevent him from attending final exams, which could put his academic career in jeopardy.

In his statement, Iyengar pointed out the broader context within which this takes place noting:

Across the country, there is a systematic effort by university administrations to suppress free speech of those who oppose the genocide in Gaza. Cornell attempted to revoke the visa of a graduate student for participating in a protest. Students at the University of California are being kicked out of student housing and made homeless by disciplinary action for protest activity.

He also pointed to the firing of Dr. Maura Finkelstein for social media posts she made opposing the Gaza genocide and asked:

Do we want colleges and universities to be places for free and open discussion, or are we going to allow MIT’s administration to essentially accuse its own students of “terrorism” and ban student-run publications for articles that attempt to thoughtfully address the burning issues of the day? Now, more than ever, we cannot take our basic democratic rights for granted.

The genocide grows worse every day. In the north of Gaza, the Jabalia refugee camp has faced unimaginable horrors under a total siege and blackout by the Israeli military occupation. The World Health Organization reported that the Sheikh Radwan healthcare center, intended for distribution of the vital polio vaccine, was bombed by the Israeli military during a “humanitarian pause.” In Lebanon, millions of people have been displaced while entire

on villages and some thousands of years old, are being entirely obliterated by the genocidal Israeli regime which seeks to erase Arab history.

It also takes place only a few months before Donald Trump’s inauguration. Trump has promised to be a “dictator on day one” after previously attempting to overthrow the presidential election results on January 6, 2021 in a violent coup. He has promised to use the military against domestic opposition and has said that Israel must “finish the problem” in relation to Palestine, echoing the language of Hitler in relation to his “final solution” for the “Jewish problem.” Iyengar makes this point in the conclusion of the letter:

And here at home, the very engine of these global atrocities, Donald Trump has threatened to establish a dictatorship and says he wants to crush protests with violence. Meanwhile, Kamala Harris has only continued to support the US complicity in genocide, and promises to use her track record of “law and order” to criminalize protestors. In the midst of this crisis, MIT’s actions only weaken our collective ability to oppose threats to humanity, whatever their source.

I therefore make the following call to all students, staff, and faculty of conscience at MIT: Do not let the administration control our speech and censor student-run publications. This is not only about me, this is about the democratic principles involved. Do not let MIT limit the boundaries of thought on this campus by restricting our ability to engage in the criticism vital to movement building. We demand the administration drop its censorship of Written Revolution and allow me to return to campus to continue my academic work and research labor.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact