

MIT student effectively expelled for opposing Gaza genocide

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Prahlad Iyengar, a second-year PhD student at MIT, has been effectively expelled from the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based university for the offense of opposing the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Iyengar has been sanctioned for writing an article “On Pacificism,” which was of an academic character, in the student magazine *Written Revolution* as the WSWs previously covered. The other “offenses” include writing an email on a non-violent protest and apparently offending Lockheed Martin recruiters. This latter event was the focus of the MIT Committee on Discipline’s latest attack on Iyengar’s democratic rights.

The WSWs calls on all students, faculty, staff and the broader working class to demand the ban and all administrative sanctions against Iyengar be lifted.

Recently, students at George Mason University were raided by the FBI for their support for Palestine. Protest encampments established by students on campuses across the country last spring demanding an end to the genocide were subject to coordinated police assaults and a bipartisan slander campaign by Democrats and Republicans accusing antiwar students of antisemitism.

These attacks on freedom of speech take place amid an escalating global war, of which the genocide in Gaza, which is estimated to have killed over 180,000, is part.

The accusations take on a flagrantly false and hypocritical character in Iyengar’s case, as the administration is guilty of the very violence they accuse him of, having sent cops against peaceful protesters and standing by while violent fascistic-Zionist thugs attacked peaceful protests and sang pro-genocide songs like “Harbu Darbu,” which openly calls for the annihilation of Gaza.

Iyengar’s attorney Eric Lee posted in response to the

ruling on X: “The decision against Prahlad Iyengar is a major blow to free speech everywhere. MIT’s admin is so deeply connected to the war profiteers that it cannot tolerate pro-Palestinian speech. This sets tone for further attacks to speech coming under Trump.”

In response to this attack on free speech the MIT Coalition Against Apartheid sent a letter to the Cambridge City Council appealing for the ban and effective expulsion to be lifted. The letter, which organizations and groups are able to sign here, was signed by over 100 student and other organizations. As the letter explains, Iyengar, a National Science Foundation (NSF) fellow, “has been suspended until January 2026, effectively terminating his 5-year NSF fellowship and severely disrupting his academic career.”

The letter explains that this suspension is in fact an expulsion as his “readmission is entirely contingent upon approval from the same Committee on Discipline (COD) that handed down this harsh sanction.” Iyengar is appealing the unjust ruling to the chancellor of MIT, Melissa Nobles, on December 11. Nobles for her part has embraced the slander equating opposition to genocide with antisemitism.

The letter notes that the administration, after facing an exposure of their claim that the academic article advocated violence they “focused their attack on less flashy charges, which have been resolved as informal warnings in similar scenarios. In making such drastic changes to the process arbitrarily and without precedent, the COD has denied Iyengar procedural fairness. These actions demonstrate a troubling abuse of power, wherein disciplinary procedures have been weaponized for political purposes.”

Iyengar explained to the *World Socialist Web Site* in an interview what the content of these less flashy

charges were, which have to do with what would normally be regarded as non-events at a career fair on September 20.

“I had a conversation with the Lockheed Martin recruiter. We talked a lot about my background and the company and then I also had some ethical questions about Lockheed Martin’s work as relates to the genocide in Gaza like in particular manufacturing of Hellfire missiles. At some point he directed me to speak his colleague and told me to speak with him about civilian technology and sensors and so I went and stood in line to speak with his colleague.

“Just when I had gotten to the front of the line the career fair staff decided to close the booth and so they moved the Lockheed Martin recruiters to a private conference room where they were going to talk to students one-on-one. I stood first in line just outside the door, I never tried to enter or anything like that. I’m being accused of harassment and intimidation, they say that my behavior was threatening and it was considered very rude and intimidating and hostile, even though I basically participated in the career fair in the same way that anybody else does.”

Iyengar remarked that “it’s one thing to directly threaten or attempt to attack the recruiters, but all I did was talk to them.”

“They have testimony that I was screaming the Lockheed Martin recruiter’s name, that when they were moved to a private conference room, that I was telling them to come out and face me and things like this. There is video evidence of the entire interaction, and that doesn’t appear at all in the video. But the Committee on Discipline decided to preferentially select those kinds of accounts and say ‘well, just because it doesn’t appear in the video doesn’t mean it didn’t happen’.

“So at this point I feel that its just a lot of made up evidence, it includes hearsay, it includes an attempt to frame a conspiracy even though they don’t have actual proof of a conspiracy.”

That is, the main piece of evidence that was used in the antidemocratic suspension is the word of recruiters from Lockheed Martin. This is the sort of regime which the funding for the militarization of academia is creating. The suppression of democratic rights is inseparable from the drive to world war.

The same COD would be in charge of seeing

Iyengar’s “reintegration” into campus if his appeal is successful. This would require among other things for him to submit documentation proving that he has changed his political views and pass an interview with the very same COD that is witch-hunting him. The clear message from the administration is “either drop your opposition to genocide or face expulsion.”

In its pursuit of Iyengar, MIT has used an evidentiary standard of the “preponderance of evidence,” which is significantly less than that which would be used in an actual court case and only requires something be “more likely than not” rather than “beyond a reasonable doubt.” This standard of evidence was introduced under the guise of preventing sexual assault.

A number of high-profile sexual witch-hunts in academia and Hollywood, such most recently that of Professor John Comaroff of Harvard University, were carried out in order to serve as a proving ground for future witch-hunts against those opposed to war and inequality. The use of these very same methods against the opponents of genocide is a further validation of the WSWs’s warnings of the reactionary character of the sexual witch-hunts, the reactionary formula of “believe all women” and the attacks on the principle of “innocent until proven guilty,” and identity politics more broadly.



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