

Free Mahmoud Khalil! Mobilize the working class against Trump's dictatorship!

WSWS Editorial Board

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Attend the IYSSE's public meetings this week, "Free Mahmoud Khalil!": Friday, March 14 at 6:30 p.m. at The Center (208 W 13th St., Room 310, New York City) and online Saturday with the Educators Rank-and-File Committee. Click here to register for the online meeting.

The World Socialist Web Site, Socialist Equality Party (US) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality demand the immediate release of Mahmoud Khalil. His seizure is a massive escalation of the attack on democratic rights. The Trump administration is operating as a dictatorship, indifferent to and uncontrolled by any laws or constitutional rights.

Khalil, a Columbia graduate and prominent advocate for last year's campus protests, is being targeted for his political views opposing the genocide in Gaza, in blatant violation of the First Amendment. He is a legal permanent resident of the United States and a green card holder. He has not been arrested for any crime or charged with one.

On Saturday night, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents ambushed Khalil and his wife, an American citizen, in the lobby of their building. They snatched him, threatened her with arrest and transported him to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) holding cell in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Even as his lawyers filed a habeas corpus motion in Manhattan, he was secretly flown 1,300 miles away to a private detention center in Louisiana.

For much of Sunday, neither his lawyers nor his wife knew where he was. This is the method of a dictatorship—a disappearance, the type of extralegal kidnapping used by Latin American military juntas.

As of this writing, a federal judge in the Southern District of New York has issued a stay on any

deportation of Khalil, pending a hearing Wednesday on whether his arrest and detention were lawful. But there is no reason to believe the Trump administration will obey this ruling.

In an extraordinary statement posted Monday, President Donald Trump boasted of his role in Khalil's arrest and threatened thousands of others with similar action. Using the standard lie promoted by the entire political establishment that opposition to the genocide is "antisemitic," Trump wrote on Truth Social: "We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity, and the Trump Administration will not tolerate it."

He then explicitly threatened mass arrests against anyone opposing the genocide in Gaza, writing, "This is the first arrest of many to come. We will find, apprehend, and deport these terrorist sympathizers from our country—never to return again."

There is no precedent in American history for such a statement. Trump is operating outside all legal constraints, openly claiming the right to strip legal residents of their rights and deport them without trial, in direct violation of the Constitution.

In his first 50 days in office, Trump has waged a systematic war on the Constitution. The steady attack on democratic rights, the arrest of political opponents, the assertion of extraordinary powers by the executive on the pretext of an "emergency"—all of this has been played out before, in Hitler's Germany, Pinochet's Chile and many other dictatorships. Trump and his coterie of Nazi lovers are smashing through laws, with each violation setting the stage for the next.

A police state is being imposed at colleges and universities, in which oppositional sentiment is criminalized under the threat of arrest or

deportation. The *Wall Street Journal* wrote on Monday that “Columbia has become ground zero in the Trump administration’s campaign to dismantle what it calls extreme leftist ideology on U.S. campuses.”

It noted that the Education Department “sent letters to 60 schools warning of potential enforcement actions if they don’t fulfill obligations to protect Jewish students. The list included Ivy League, state and small liberal-arts colleges.”

The assault, however, will not be limited to campuses. Anyone who opposes the actions of the Trump regime and the interests of the ruling class it represents will be targeted. In particular, workers who take action and strike against attacks on their living standards could be subject to seizure.

The attack on Khalil takes place in the context of mass layoffs of tens of thousands of federal workers by Trump and Elon Musk, the elimination of all restraints on corporate exploitation, and a frontal assault on social programs like Medicaid and Social Security. The assault on democratic rights is inseparably connected to the deepening war preparations—from Trump’s calls to annex Greenland and Canada to his backing of Israel’s ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

Not a single leading Democrat has opposed Khalil’s illegal arrest and threatened deportation. New York Governor Kathy Hochul has said nothing, and she personally called for “swift action” against student protesters at Columbia earlier this month. A spokesman for New York City Mayor Eric Adams, who has been working closely with Trump and previously denounced protesters as “outside agitators,” issued a perfunctory statement that the city “does not cooperate with ICE.”

The top Democrats in the Senate and House of Representatives, along with “independent” Senator Bernie Sanders, have all remained silent.

Columbia University, deeply tied to the Democratic Party, played an active role in the attack on Khalil. Just days before his arrest, Khalil warned interim President Katrina Armstrong that he was being subjected to a coordinated doxxing campaign led by Columbia Professor Shai Davidai and others, who labeled him a “security threat” and called for his deportation.

“I haven’t been able to sleep, fearing that ICE or a dangerous individual might come to my home,” he wrote, pleading for legal support and protection. Columbia ignored his appeals, allowing Trump’s

agents to drag him from his home.

The arrest of Khalil has triggered widespread outrage. More than 1.2 million people have participated in a letter-writing campaign launched by on-campus groups. Over half a million have signed petitions demanding his freedom.

A group of Columbia faculty and other supporters, including a local rabbi, held a press conference at Columbia Monday afternoon to denounce Khalil’s seizure, while hundreds of supporters demonstrated outside the Manhattan federal court.

These actions must be expanded. Mass meetings and demonstrations should be organized at Columbia, New York University and other schools throughout the city, state and nationally.

Students cannot be left to fight alone. This fight must be taken into the working class. Khalil is a member of the United Auto Workers (UAW), yet the UAW leadership has remained silent. Rank-and-file workers must act. Graduate students in the UAW, along with autoworkers, educators, Amazon workers, healthcare workers, and every section of the working class must take up the fight for Khalil’s freedom.

Rank-and-file committees must be established in workplaces and factories to defend democratic rights, linking this struggle to the broader fight against Trump’s assault on the working class.

No one should underestimate the scale of this assault on democratic rights. This is the rule of the oligarchy in action.

The greatest mistake would be to place any faith in the Democratic Party or the trade union apparatus. The fight to free Mahmoud Khalil is an inseparable part of the broader struggle against the dictatorship of the financial oligarchy. The working class must intervene with its own independent strength to defend democratic rights and oppose the turn to war and dictatorship.



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