

Release Mohsen Mahdawi! Mobilize the working class against dictatorship, genocide and imperialist war!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
16 April 2025

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IY SSE) demands the immediate release of Mohsen Mahdawi and calls for the broadest possible resistance among workers and youth to this assault on democratic rights. Mahdawi's seizure is the latest in the Trump administration's escalating campaign of terror targeting international students across the country.

The democratic rights of the entire working population are under assault. We urge mass action by the working class, including protests and strike action across the country, to bring an end to Trump's plan for dictatorship.

Mahdawi, a student at Columbia University in New York and legal permanent resident of the United States, was snatched up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at the US Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Colchester, Vermont. The ICE-Gestapo had prepared the location as a trap for Mahdawi, who thought he was showing up for a citizenship interview.

A Palestinian born in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Mahdawi faces deportation to a territory which is currently under siege by the genocidal regime of Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu. Such a deportation would be a "kind of a death sentence ... because my people are being killed unjustly in an indiscriminate way," Mahdawi told *The Intercept*.

Mahdawi was a leader of the student protests at Columbia in 2023 and 2024 against Israel's genocide in Gaza, alongside his fellow activist and friend Mahmoud Khalil. A legal resident of the US, Khalil now faces deportation following a Louisiana immigration judge's ruling affirming the invocation of the Immigration and Nationality Act to deport Khalil on the basis of his political views.

Like Khalil, Mahdawi has not been accused, charged or convicted of any crime. He has been detained for his opposition to the Israeli genocide, backed to the hilt and overseen by American imperialism.

Both Mahdawi and Khalil have been seized based on declarations from Secretary of State Marco Rubio that their presence in the US is contrary to "compelling US foreign policy interests," because of their opposition to the Gaza genocide.

In a statement to *The Intercept*, Mahdawi's attorney Luna Droubi said, "Mohsen Mahdawi was unlawfully detained today for no reason other than his Palestinian identity. He came to this

country hoping to be free to speak out about the atrocities he has witnessed, only to be punished for such speech."

As of this writing, federal judge William K. Sessions III, responding to the habeas corpus petition by Mahdawi's attorneys, has issued a temporary restraining order preventing Mahdawi from being "removed from the United States or moved out of the territory of the District of Vermont pending further order of this Court." The habeas corpus petition reads in part:

The government has made clear that it intends to retaliate and punish individuals such as Mr. Mahdawi who advocated for a cease fire and ending the bloodshed in Gaza. Respondents' actions plainly violate the First Amendment, which protects Mr. Mahdawi's right to speak on matters of public concern and prevents the government from chilling constitutionally-protected speech.

In addition to violating Mr. Mahdawi's First Amendment rights, the Rubio Determination and Mr. Mahdawi's unlawful detention also violates Mr. Mahdawi's statutory rights and due process rights.

Public statements by government officials, including statements by the President and Secretary of State, establish that Respondents have detained Mr. Mahdawi to punish and silence him because of his constitutionally protected speech, beliefs, statements, or associations.

Mahdawi had been targeted by the Zionist organization Betar, which reported him and other pro-Palestinian student activists to the State Department. Among those were Cornell graduate student Momodou Taal, with Betar appealing for Secretary of State Marco Rubio to revoke his student visa and have him removed from the country.

Betar, working in collaboration with the pro-Israel doxing website Canary Mission, have made themselves foot soldiers of Trump's campaign to establish a fascist dictatorship.

Like other ultra-right groups, Betar, which traces its origins to the fascist-Zionist youth movement founded by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, was emboldened by Trump's return to the White House. The organization claims full credit for the detention of Mahdawi,

stating, “We have nothing to apologize for. As the forefather of Zionism, Ze’ev Jabotinsky said in 1911, No Apologies.”

Mahdawi’s detainment comes on the heels of the Supreme Court ruling that allowed the Trump administration to invoke the Alien Enemies Act in mass abductions and expulsions.

Most recently, Trump’s warm welcome at the White House of El Salvador’s fascist president Nayib Bukele—who agreed to accept unlimited numbers of people, including US citizens, and imprison them in one of the most brutal detention facilities on the planet—has marked another step in the consolidation of a presidential dictatorship in the US.

In recent weeks, more than 1,300 international students have had their visa status revoked as part of an intensifying crackdown by the Trump administration on foreign students and universities. Many revocations are being justified under a 1990 clause in the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows the Secretary of State to revoke a visa if the student presents “potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences.” In other words, the law targets all those opposed to the war policies of American imperialism.

It must be stressed that this authoritarian campaign will not be limited to international students. It will be expanded to the entire working class unless it is stopped.

The turn of the capitalist ruling class to dictatorship is inherently linked to the escalating assault on the basic democratic, social and economic rights of the working class, expressed in the slashing of social programs, the mass firing of federal workers, the elimination of basic regulatory protections, and the escalation of war and repression to enforce the interests of the financial elite.

Trump is not a rotten apple in an otherwise clean bushel, but the expression of a capitalist system in terminal crisis, one that sees no way out except through mass repression, social counterrevolution and world war. His administration is of, by, and for the capitalist oligarchy, representing the violent realignment of the superstructure of US politics to correspond to the oligarchic character of American capitalism.

In opposing this repression, young people must cast aside any illusions in the Democratic Party and break the chains of this party of Wall Street and imperialist war.

Particularly revealing in the case of Mahdawi is the role of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. Mahdawi directly appealed to Sanders’ office, concerned that his citizenship interview appointment was a trap. Prior to his detention, Mahdawi pleaded for Sanders and his state representatives to intervene in his defense.

Sanders, Vermont Senator Peter Welch and Vermont Representative Becca Balint, all Democrats or supporters of the Democratic Party, issued a statement only after Mahdawi’s detention. They said that he “must be afforded due process under the law and immediately released from detention.” But they will take no action.

Sanders and the entire Democratic Party bear responsibility for Mahdawi’s detention and the rise of the fascist Trump. The administration of Joe Biden, for which Sanders was the most prominent cheerleader, supported Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians and oversaw sweeping police attacks on pro-

Palestinian student protesters. Democratic politicians of every stripe joined hands with Republicans to slander opposition to the genocide as “antisemitic.” Sanders, as well as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)-backed members of the House of Representatives, continue to vote to fund and arm Israel.

At Columbia and other major universities, Democratic Party supporters collaborate with the Trump administration in the kidnapping and deportation of students like Mahdawi and the institution of a reign of terror on campuses.

Former Columbia University law professor Katherine Franke reported on Monday that the university is planning to “announce an agreement to formal oversight by Trump.” The university, controlled by upper-middle class layers in and around the Democratic Party and Wall Street executives, is further bowing to the ultra-right demands of Trump for a crackdown on free speech.

The fight for the freedom of Mahdawi, Khalil and other students cannot be waged on the campuses alone. If there is to be an effective opposition to dictatorship, imperialist war, genocide, austerity and inequality, it must come from the working class, independently mobilized on the basis of a socialist, Trotskyist program and united internationally against capitalism.

The protests that took place on April 5, involving millions of people across the US and internationally, revealed the tremendous opposition to the Trump administration that is developing across the globe. But this opposition must now be armed with a clear political perspective.

The critical political lesson of the extended period of continuous anti-genocide and, more recently, anti-Trump protests is that fascism, genocide and imperialist war cannot be opposed through pressuring the ruling elite and its representatives in the university administrations, the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy.

The IYSSE, the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), fights for the development of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighborhood, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which will connect the defense of the interests of workers with the fight against war and dictatorship.

A mass movement, based on an entirely new political axis, must be developed, rooted in the working class, in the US and throughout the world. This requires a serious theoretical and political orientation of youth and students and their education in the history and political heritage of the class struggle and of the Trotskyist movement.

All students and youth who agree with this perspective should join the IYSSE to take up the fight to build a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class in the US and around the world.



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