Department of Homeland Security revokes Harvard University's ability to enroll international students

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US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) head Kristi Noem sent a letter to Harvard University Thursday informing the school's administration that she was revoking its ability to enroll international students under the Student and Exchange Visitor Program.

Noem's action could compel more than a quarter of the student body, all of whom are in the US legally, to transfer schools or leave the country. It comes in the midst of an ongoing lawsuit between Harvard and the Trump administration over the university's rejection of Trump's demands to suppress free speech and thought and establish government and right-wing ideological control over certain departments.

In a press statement released on the DHS website on May 22, the Trump administration outlined its fascistic threat to higher education. The statement also makes clear that a significant driving factor in the attack on academia is the campaign to deepen preparations for a war with China.

> This administration is holding Harvard accountable for fostering violence, antisemitism, and coordinating with the Chinese Communist Party on its campus. It is a privilege, not a right, for universities to enroll foreign students and benefit from their higher tuition payments to help pad their multibillion-dollar endowments. Harvard had plenty of opportunity to do the right thing. It refused. They have lost their Student and Exchange Visitor Program certification as a result of their failure to adhere to the law. Let this serve as a warning to all universities and academic institutions across the country.
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> This means Harvard can no longer enroll foreign students, and existing foreign students must transfer or lose their legal status.

The DHS also seeks to transform Harvard and all other universities into cooperating surveillance arms of the state. In exchange for the return of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program certification, the DHS is demanding that Harvard provide "[A]ny and all records, whether official or informal, in the possession of Harvard University, including electronic records and audio or video footage" regarding the "illegal" or "violent" activity of non-citizen students enrolled in the last five years and "any and all disciplinary records of all nonimmigrant students."

The DHS letter further demands that Harvard provide all footage and records of "any protest activity involving a nonimmigrant student on a Harvard University campus in the last five years."

The revocation of the certification for the Student and Exchange Visitor Program is retaliation by the Trump administration for Harvard's refusal to submit to the sweeping records request by the DHS in its investigation into Harvard's curriculum and admissions practices, which include data and information which Harvard is not legally permitted to share and would constitute a massive violation of the academic privacy of students and faculty.

Harvard shared limited information with DHS while protesting the extent of the data request to which DHS Secretary Kristi Noem responded that Harvard failed "to comply with simple reporting requirements."

This latest attack is an escalation of the Trump administration's campaign against higher education and international students as the spearhead of the preparations for a presidential dictatorship. Seeking to coerce and control academic decision-making at the university, and universities across the country, Trump is utilizing the Department of Homeland Security to create an American version of the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung*—bringing into line academia as a propaganda arm of the regime.

This includes previous demands that Harvard prevent the admission of students deemed "hostile to American values,"

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such as those allegedly supporting terrorism or "antisemitism." The administration is seeking the same capitulation from Harvard that it achieved with Columbia, which resulted in the political monitoring of certain departments to eliminate opposition to Zionism and US imperialism. This is a component part of the broader effort to suppress opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

In a previous letter to Harvard, DHS Secretary Noem wrote:

> It is a privilege to have foreign students attend Harvard University, not a guarantee. The United States government understands that Harvard University relies heavily on foreign student funding from over 10,000 foreign students to build and maintain their substantial endowment.

The accusation that Harvard failed to condemn "antisemitism" on campus is the justification used to crack down on opposition to the Gaza genocide. Harvard was among the universities investigated by the Trump administration over alleged "antisemitic" incidents supposedly creating "a hostile learning environment for Jewish students."

Trump has also demanded that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status. Trump, with his thuggish tactics, does not care that the president does not legally have the authority to order IRS investigations. The IRS has, as of this writing, not made a decision on whether it will revoke the tax exemption.

On April 14, Harvard President Alan Garber announced that the university would not comply with the Trump administration's demand for government oversight and right-wing ideological control of academic affairs. The decision to take a stand was welcomed by broad layers of the population and students and faculty, who provided the impetus for opposition. Harvard filed its lawsuit against the Trump administration, demanding a federal court block the government's attempt to control academic decision-making. The lawsuit names several key Trump administration officials as defendants.

At stake in Harvard's lawsuit is the freezing of over $2.2 billion in research grants and the threat of cutting off an additional $1 billion in government funding, totaling over $3 billion. The White House justified these financial threats by once again citing Harvard's alleged failure to address "antisemitism" and its opposition to directives on admissions and diversity policies.

The lawsuit argues that the government's actions violate the First Amendment by seeking to coerce the university and control teaching, disregarding principles that safeguard academic freedom. Harvard's complaint also argues that the funding freeze is unlawful, violates the terms of the government's funding agreement, and fails to follow the statutorily mandated process under Title VI. The university argues there is no rational connection between antisemitism concerns and the frozen research funding.

Whether or not Harvard prevails in court, the attacks on democratic rights, academic freedom and international students will not be halted without the intervention of the working class. While Harvard has publicly defended academic freedom, its opposition to the Trump administration is limited by its character as a major capitalist-imperialist institution with ties to the government and military-intelligence apparatus.

Noem's latest attack comes as student protests against the Gaza genocide have intensified, with a wave of demonstrations taking place at graduation ceremonies, including at Columbia and New York University.

There exists deep opposition to dictatorship and genocide, but it must be mobilized independently of the administrators of the universities, who represent a layer which seeks reprieve and compromise with the Trump administration.

The only viable path to oppose the Trump administration and the turn by the ruling class towards a presidential dictatorship and to defend international students and academic freedom is to build a socialist movement against the capitalist system.

The defense of Harvard and other universities requires the building of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the revolutionary movement of young people based on a socialist program and oriented to the international working class, to consciously lead and spearhead this movement.

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