

Oppose the Trump administration's fascist attack on international students and academic freedom at Harvard!

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24 May 2025

The Trump administration's move to strip Harvard University of its ability to enroll international students is a fascist assault on democratic rights and an attempt to place the entire university system under direct political control by a gangster regime in Washington. This attack must be opposed through the broadest possible mobilization of the working class to defend international students, academic freedom and the right to free speech.

The White House's action, announced Thursday, would immediately impact a quarter of Harvard's student body—approximately 6,800 individuals from over 100 countries. These students would be forced either to transfer, leave the country or face deportation, along with some 300 dependents. Nationally, between 1.1 million and 1.36 million international students are currently enrolled in US colleges and universities.

On Friday, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) blocking the White House action pending a May 29 hearing on whether to grant a preliminary injunction. But this fight cannot be left to the courts, which the Trump administration has repeatedly defied in any case. The working class must act to oppose this assault and defend international students and the right to free speech.

The White House action involves terminating Harvard's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certification, barring the university from sponsoring F- and J-visas for international students and exchange visitors in the 2025–26 academic year. There is no precedent for the wholesale revocation of a university's SEVP certification, which was itself established as part of the anti-democratic actions following the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The White House justified the measure by claiming that Harvard had allowed “anti-American, pro-terrorist

agitators” to threaten and assault Jewish students, creating an “unsafe” campus environment. This slanderous lie against protests over the Gaza genocide is made by a government riddled with fascists that is overseeing and backing the systematic ethnic cleansing and extermination of the Palestinian people through mass starvation.

The attack on Harvard lies at the intersection of the Trump administration's drive to establish a political dictatorship and its preparations for war. The executive order explicitly accuses Harvard of collaborating with the Chinese Communist Party—a fabricated charge aimed at branding all Chinese students and scholars as spies and conditioning the American population for war with China.

The moves against Harvard are part of an effort to transform universities from institutions of learning into surveillance centers and enforcement arms of the state.

As Harvard's filing requesting a temporary restraining order noted, the effort to revoke its ability to sponsor international students is “in clear retaliation” for the university's rejection last month of “the government's demands to control Harvard's governance, curriculum, and the ‘ideology’ of its faculty and students.”

In a letter sent Thursday, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem ordered Harvard to turn over five years of surveillance, disciplinary and political records on international students. Noem directed the university to provide “any and all records, whether official or informal,” related to “illegal activity,” “dangerous or violent activity,” “threats to other students or university personnel,” or “deprivation of rights of other classmates.” She also demanded all disciplinary records of international students and “any and all audio or video footage ... of any protest activity involving a nonimmigrant student.”

The attack on Harvard is only the beginning. The same

methods will be extended to every other university—and beyond that, to schools, workplaces, and public institutions across the country. On Thursday, Noem threatened that the White House was “absolutely” looking at other institutions and that the action against Harvard “should be a warning to every other university.”

On the same day, the US Department of Health and Human Services declared that Columbia University—which has capitulated to many of the administration’s demands—violated federal civil rights law by “acting with deliberate indifference” to allegations of “student-on-student harassment of Jewish students.”

The working class must act. The attack on Harvard’s international students is part of a broader drive by the Trump administration to establish a police state and abolish the most basic democratic rights. It is one front in a wider campaign of mass deportations under the Alien Enemies Act, the revocation of hundreds of visas of international students for opposing the genocide in Gaza, and the disappearance of immigrants into secret prison camps abroad.

In the face of this assault, the response of the trade union bureaucracy—including the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the AFL-CIO—has been one of cowardice and complicity.

Many of the international students now facing deportation are members of the Harvard Graduate Students Union–UAW (HGSU-UAW). Yet the UAW apparatus has done nothing to defend them, and neither the UAW nor its president, Shawn Fain, has issued a statement in response to the attack on international students.

Fain has personally thrown his support behind Trump’s economic nationalism, embracing the “America First” agenda and endorsing the trade war measures that are inseparable from the broader attack on democratic rights.

As for the Democratic Party, it is complicit in the assault on democratic rights. It paved the way for the attack on Harvard by embracing the lie that opposition to genocide is “antisemitism” and spearheading the persecution of student protesters under Biden. This is a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus. What terrifies the Democrats is not Trump’s authoritarianism but the growth of opposition to it from below—above all, from the working class.

Nor can any confidence be placed in the Harvard administration, which has repeatedly sought accommodation with Trump, insisting that it is complying with the administration’s demands, and is deeply tied to

the corporate-state apparatus.

While the university’s opposition to the White House has been welcomed by students, it—like other administrations—has participated in the repression of student protesters. Just last week, New York University took the shameful act of withholding the diploma of graduating student Logan Rozos for speaking out against the genocide.

The defense of democratic rights depends upon the intervention of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), call for the organization of industrial and political action in support of Harvard students and all those under attack. Rank-and-file committees must be established in every workplace, including among members of the UAW, to coordinate resistance across industries.

The defense of the most basic democratic rights is a class question. The same government that is waging war on democratic rights is preparing the most sweeping assault on social programs in American history. Trump’s “Big Beautiful Bill” would slash hundreds of billions of dollars from Medicaid, Medicare, and food assistance to fund massive tax cuts for the rich, expand the military and further fatten corporate profits.

The attack on democratic rights is aimed above all at the working class, which the ruling elite views—correctly—as the only social force capable of challenging its domination. The defense of democratic rights is bound up with the building of a conscious, socialist leadership in the working class to unify and direct this opposition in a revolutionary struggle against capitalism.



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