

Students, faculty protest against academic censorship at Texas A&M University

Our reporter
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On January 29, students, faculty and alumni at Texas A&M University gathered at Academic Plaza to protest the censorship of more than 200 courses following the Board of Regents' ban on classroom discussions of race and gender last fall. More than 300 people attended the rally, voicing opposition not only to the academic repression unfolding at Texas A&M and universities nationwide, but to the broader drive toward authoritarianism by the ruling class.

At the beginning of the spring semester, faculty revealed that over 200 courses had been flagged or canceled following amendments to A&M's Civil Rights Protection and Compliance and Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure policies that were approved by the university system board the previous semester. The anti-democratic measures, aimed at prohibiting the "advocation" of "race and gender ideology," mandate per-semester reviews of syllabi for core courses and have reportedly relied on AI to flag material for noncompliance. This followed the firing of an instructor for discussing gender in the classroom and the forced resignation of university President Mark A. Welsh.

Many participants at the rally carried homemade signs drawing attention to the parallels between the ongoing assault on democratic rights and the policies of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. One sign read, "Goebbels would be proud of TAMU." Others condemned the reign of terror carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Minneapolis and across the country, likening the agency to the Gestapo and calling for a general strike.

Among the speakers were Martin Peterson, a professor forced to remove a passage from Plato from his syllabus, and Dr. Leonard Bright, whose graduate-level Ethics course was canceled despite having fully documented that discussion of the banned topics was academically necessary. Their remarks exposed the far-reaching implications of the ban, which has affected not only the liberal arts but also curricula in public health and other scientific disciplines. Both denounced the intimidation and silencing of academics being carried out by university administrations.

Students expressed anger and alarm over the attack on their right to learn and the degradation of the quality of their education. Speakers denounced Texas Republican politicians

who pushed for the firing of professor Melissa McCoul last year for discussing gender in the classroom and who continue to target other academics.

The event was hosted by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), MOVE Texas and other student organizations. The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) also participated. While representatives of these Democratic Party-aligned groups at times alluded to the crisis of American democracy and the threat of fascism, they did not provide a political perspective capable of explaining the origins of the crisis or offering a way forward.

The PSL endorsed the call for a general strike—a demand that emerged from workers and students in Minneapolis and is gaining broader support nationally—but failed to explain what a general strike is or how it can be built. Instead, it called for consumer boycotts, school walkouts and individual absenteeism to mark a national day of action on Friday, January 31.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) intervened at the rally, fighting to link the rally to the fight against dictatorship. IYSSE member Josh spoke at the event, centering his remarks on the connection between academic repression and the broader turn toward dictatorship, and stressing the necessity of uniting students turning to the working class.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality calls on all Texas A&M students to be here today not just to oppose censorship at one university, but as part of the fight against the Trump administration's drive toward dictatorship. Today we are protesting the censorship and cancellation of more than 200 courses and the ban on discussing race and gender in the classroom. But students must not stop at attending this rally. This protest must be the first step in a much broader fight to stop an all-out assault on democratic rights.

To understand what is happening here, we have to look at what has been happening in Minneapolis over the past month. In Minneapolis, Trump's paramilitary

gestapo has occupied the city and kidnapped and terrorized its residents. Renée Nicole Good was killed. Barely two weeks later, Alex Pretti was executed in the street by Department of Homeland Security officers.

In response, hundreds of thousands took to the streets. Neighborhood committees formed spontaneously to defend communities against police repression and federal raids. And most importantly, a new slogan emerged and spread rapidly: general strike.

That is a significant development. The call for a general strike expresses a growing understanding that appeals to the courts, to politicians or to institutions that collaborate with fascists will not defend democratic rights. Only mass collective action by the working class has that power.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its January 26 perspective, what is happening in Minneapolis is not an isolated local crisis. It is the spearhead of a nationwide conspiracy to dictatorship.

Universities are being brought into line to enforce ideological conformity. Courses are being canceled because they don't want us thinking critically about the source of the attack on democratic rights, which is capitalism, or learning about the history of the struggle against it.

Meanwhile, we are being told by Democratic Party officials to trust the courts, even as Trump has made clear he will not abide by court rulings and as the Supreme Court has been packed with Trump loyalists. We are told to wait for the next elections, when it is not even clear that free elections will be allowed to take place at all. And we are told to "know our rights" at the very moment those rights are being trampled underfoot. These appeals are not a strategy for defending democracy; they are a strategy for paralyzing opposition while authoritarian measures are consolidated.

In opposition to this, he advanced the Socialist Equality Party's call for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and school to prepare a general strike aimed at grinding the economy to a halt and establishing socialism, drawing applause from the crowd.

Students who spoke with the IYSSE afterward expressed anger at the Democratic Party's complicity and declared their enthusiasm for the call for a general strike.

One student explained that the historical comparisons were not rhetorical exaggerations but arose from direct experience. She described studying abroad in Germany and confronting the physical remnants of the Holocaust—train stations, streets and public markers that testified to the price of dictatorship. "It's one thing to learn about it in books," she said, "and another very different thing to actually live it and experience it."

Recalling a train ride through Germany, she explained, "I was trying to hold my tears because those were the exact tracks Jews and others were taken on to the camps."

"It made me really see our society and government right now," she continued. "The things that hate can do, and how far it can go when people don't speak up. That's something I'm trying not to let happen. Not on my time."

Another student who spoke with the IYSSE was a veteran Army medic who had been deployed to Iraq, part of a family spanning multiple generations of military service. She denounced the expansion of what she described as "forever wars," stressing that endless militarism abroad is inseparable from the assault on democratic rights at home. "We aren't fighting for anyone's freedom out there," she said. "I was in Iraq. My dad was in Iraq. How many generations are we going to stay in these places—fighting when we're not even wanted there?"

She spoke about her experience being in the Corps of Cadets, a student military group at TAMU linked to the Reserve Officer Training Corp, which pays tuition and expenses for students in exchange for commitment to military service. She warned, "You actually sign a paper when you come in, which most people don't read, that says essentially that you can be drafted as an officer as long as you finish those first two years which is why being in the Corps of Cadets you're required to do the first two years of ROTC."

Exposing the danger these students face in being lured into war, she elaborated, "It's something that is just kind of expected that'll never happen again and in the age of forever wars who knows when we're going to get another draft. I don't feel like a lot of students are really fully informed on what this means for them."

Drawing on her experience in a medevac unit, she described the human cost of these wars, including suicide and severe injuries inflicted by drone warfare. "It wasn't an abstract thing," she said. "We saw the casualties of it." Asked what these wars ultimately served, she replied bluntly: "For what? Oil. It's always oil." She emphasized that the decisions leading to mass death and destruction are made by political and corporate elites who bear none of the consequences.

She supported the call for a general strike, stating, "Honestly, I think a general strike is probably the only true solution to any of this. You have to hit the people who have where it hurts. And the only way to do that for them is money."



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