

2 more University of Michigan anti-genocide protesters released on bond in conspiracy frame-up

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Two more University of Michigan anti-war activists entered pleas of not guilty on June 15 before the US District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. The federal conspiracy prosecution of the U-Mich Eight is a Trump administration assault on First Amendment protections and a pseudo-legal attempt to criminalize routine activities of political organization.

The eight people being prosecuted are students, former students, or student employees of the university who were involved in protests demanding that U-Mich divest from Israel.

Ahmet Kerem Korkaya, 28, and Alexander Matthew Sepulveda, 23, were arraigned on June 15 and released on bail. Korkaya was a student at the Medical College of Wisconsin and conducted research at U-Mich in 2023-24. Sepulveda was the co-founder of the Jewish Voice for Peace chapter at U-Mich.

Their appearance follows the arraignment of four co-defendants on June 12: Paige Feyock, 26; Zainab Hakim, 23; Colin Weger, 24; and Jonathan Zou, 22, all of whom also pleaded not guilty and were released on bond. Miriam Odeh, 24, former president of Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), is scheduled for arraignment on July 1. The seven were arrested June 10 in coordinated FBI raids across southeast Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin. An eighth defendant, Amatullah Hakim, 21, the sister of Zainab Hakim, is currently in India on a work-study program.

These prosecutions escalate the drive by the Trump administration to construct a pseudo-legal framework for the criminalization of left-wing political opposition. On September 22, 2025, Trump issued an executive order designating Antifa as a “domestic terrorist organization.” Three days later, he issued National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 (NSPM-7), a fascistic blueprint that names “anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism and anti-Christianity” as “common threads animating” domestic terrorism. In March of this year, nine North Texas activists were convicted of

“material support for terrorism” for their alleged role in a July 4, 2025 protest at an ICE detention center, the first large-scale application of that charge against left-wing protesters.

The core of the government’s case against the U-Mich Eight rests on counts one through eight of the indictment, which allege a “conspiracy to transmit threats in interstate and foreign commerce” under 18 U.S.C. §§ 371 and 875(c). The allegations of graffiti, property defacement and minor vandalism contained in the indictment would ordinarily be handled through local misdemeanor or state-level property statutes.

Instead, federal prosecutors have conjured up felony conspiracies. The “interstate commerce” requirement for federal jurisdiction is ostensibly satisfied purely by the fact that students used modern communications infrastructure to voice their dissent. They used encrypted messaging, documented their actions through photography, broadcast their demands, and organized political demonstrations on Instagram and Twitter/X. Under this pseudo-legal framework, any coordinated digital campaign targeting powerful political figures or corporate entities can be reclassified as an interstate criminal syndicate.

Among the phrases the government presents as criminal are: “if you aren’t losing sleep after funding mass murder and genocide, then WE WILL WAKE YOU UP”; “we must escalate, mobilize, and organize to demand divestment by any means necessary”; “our duty to Palestine is to damage, disrupt, and destroy the colonizers’ operations by any means necessary”; and “Do not forget ... You sleep only because we let you.”

The phrase “by any means necessary” has been used by the labor movement, anti-war coalitions and civil rights campaigners for generations. The government is effectively stripping the working class and students of the right to employ urgent, aggressive or confrontational rhetoric against the ruling elite. As Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)-Michigan staff attorney Amy Doukoure noted:

“None of that seems like a threat when you’re talking about First Amendment law.”

Count Nine, charging Zainab Hakim and Paige Feyock with “witness intimidation” under 18 U.S.C. §§ 1512(b)(3) and (k), is a transparent attempt to manufacture a narrative of criminal intimidation out of thin air. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison.

To sustain a federal charge of witness tampering, the government must demonstrate that the defendants used physical force, explicit threats of violence, corrupt persuasion, or fraudulent misleading conduct with the specific intent to induce a witness to withhold testimony or alter evidence. An objective reading of the “overt acts” listed under Count Nine reveals a total absence of these legal elements.

The government’s evidence shows that in July of 2024, the defendants shared text messages expressing internal group anxiety that a fellow student, identified as Victim Six (V-6), was a “snitch” who was “going full fed mode.” Feyock texted Hakim that V-6 was “going to send us to federal prison,” to which Hakim replied, “imagine we are so careful with so many actions and his ass lands us in jail.” On August 5, 2024, Feyock messaged that V-6 was a “liability” who “has to be neutralized,” adding that she and Hakim were “getting coffee with him tomorrow evening” to see if he was wearing a wire.

The meeting consisted of two young women sitting down with a classmate in a public café to determine whether he was cooperating with law enforcement. There was no violence, no blackmail, no extortion. They concluded that the classmate knew nothing and went home. For this, they face 20 years in prison.

The same modus operandi of inflating minor infractions into federal felonies applies to the Department of Justice’s prosecution of Chinese researchers at U-Mich. Five Chinese researchers affiliated with the university were charged with conspiracy and smuggling over routine customs paperwork violations. They were arrested, jailed and either deported or forced to return to China. The witch-hunt led to the suicide in March of post-doctoral research scientist Danhao Wang.

Neither Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer nor Attorney General Dana Nessel has made a public statement addressing the federal indictments against the U-Mich Eight, but the FBI credited Nessel’s office for providing logistical assistance in the investigation. Unable to secure convictions in state court, Nessel colluded with the Trump administration to finish the job.

The government attack on U-Mich anti-genocide protesters has from the start been a bipartisan operation. The Biden administration joined with Republicans to smear pro-Palestinian protesters as antisemites and supported

crackdowns on peaceful demonstrators by campus and local police.

In May of 2024, the U-Mich administration sent police to break up a Gaza solidarity encampment on university grounds. Nessel hit 11 protesters with state-level felony and misdemeanor charges. Defense attorneys filed a motion for Nessel’s recusal, arguing that her extensive ties to Zionist advocacy organizations and her political reliance on the university regents constituted a conflict of interest.

In May of 2025, Nessel abruptly dismissed all charges against the protesters. In a vindictive public statement, she refused to concede that her case lacked merit, blaming instead the “circus-like atmosphere” of the proceedings and complaining that local non-profits had communicated with the court. Nessel’s state prosecutions collapsed because her dragnet was constitutionally indefensible.

At the same time, U-Mich devoted hundreds of thousands of dollars to a surveillance operation, using the firm City Shield, a private security contractor, to deploy plainclothes operatives to spy on student protesters.

These illegal and unconstitutional methods are being refined and tested on students today so they can be deployed against striking autoworkers, teachers and logistics workers tomorrow. The defense of the targeted students cannot be left to the courts, nor can it rely on appeals to the Democrats and Republicans carrying out the persecution.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality demand the immediate dropping of all charges against the University of Michigan Eight and an end to the persecution of anti-war protesters nationwide. The defense of democratic rights and the defeat of the imperialist war machine require the independent political mobilization of the international working class against the source of war and dictatorship—the capitalist profit system.



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