

Defend the University of Michigan Eight! Drop all charges! Mobilize the working class against dictatorship and war!

Stephen St. Clair
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The following is a report delivered to a June 25 public meeting of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan.

On June 10, 2026, the FBI carried out coordinated pre-dawn raids across southeast Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin, arresting seven pro-Palestinian activists at the University of Michigan (U-Mich). An eighth defendant was later identified as being in India. A 63-page indictment, secretly filed on May 20 and unsealed that morning, charged all eight with federal conspiracy offenses carrying penalties of up to 20 years in prison.

The eight defendants were involved in protests against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has killed over 72,000 people according to official figures, though the true toll is far higher. The protesters' demands included a call for the University of Michigan to divest itself from Israel.

The eight defendants are Zainab Hakim, 23, of Canton Township; her sister Amatullah Hakim, 21, of Ann Arbor; Paige Feyock, 26, of Ann Arbor; Ahmet Korkaya, 28, of Milwaukee; Jonathan Zou, 22, of Ann Arbor; Alexander Sepulveda, 23, of Chicago; Miriam Odeh, 24, of Dearborn; and Colin Weger, 24, of Ann Arbor. They are students, former students, and student employees of the university. Six have now appeared before federal judges in Detroit, entered pleas of not guilty, and been released on bond. Two more await arraignment.

This prosecution is a blatant and dangerous political witch-hunt and frame-up. It must not be allowed to stand. It is a major escalation by the Trump administration of the effort to criminalize left-wing opposition to war, dictatorship and social inequality.

What is the supposed crime?

What is the supposed crime of the U-Mich Eight? The government alleges a “conspiracy to transmit threats in interstate and foreign commerce,” for which all eight face five years in prison. The “interstate commerce” requirement for federal jurisdiction is satisfied purely by the fact that the defendants used modern communications infrastructure—encrypted messaging, social media, photography—to voice their dissent and organize political demonstrations.

The indictment presents as criminal such phrases as “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”; and “Our duty to Palestine is to damage, disrupt, and destroy the colonizers’ operations.” The phrase “by any means necessary” has been used by the labor movement, anti-war coalitions and civil rights campaigners for generations.

There is a witness intimidation charge, a 20-year felony. It is built on the fact that two defendants, Paige Feyock and Zainab Hakim, sat down with a classmate at a public café to determine whether he was cooperating with law enforcement. They concluded he knew nothing and went home. For this, they face two decades in federal prison.

None of the indicted conduct involves physical injury to any person. The allegations of graffiti, property defacement, and minor vandalism would, if prosecuted at all, ordinarily be handled as state-level misdemeanors. Instead, the government has invoked conspiracy statutes and the interstate commerce clause to transform political protest into federal felonies.

This attack is directed not only at supporters of the Palestinian people. It is part of a far broader assault on democratic rights, including First Amendment-protected speech and political advocacy. The same pseudo-legal framework is being used to criminalize political activity across the country.

This meeting is a call to action. We are calling on all students, campus workers, professors, and staff to unite and demand the immediate dropping of all charges against the U-Mich Eight, the immediate dropping of charges against the Minnesota 15, who have been arrested and face federal felony charges for protesting against ICE, and the immediate release of the eight anti-ICE Prairieland defendants in North Texas, who were convicted in March on “material support for terrorism” charges and sentenced on Tuesday to a total of 450 years in prison.

Class justice

In Minnesota, 15 anti-ICE protesters were indicted June 16 on federal felony charges, including conspiracy to impede or injure federal officers. Their supposed crime? They protested against Operation Metro Surge, the deployment of thousands of armed ICE and Customs and Border Protection officers rampaging through neighborhoods, breaking into homes and businesses, grabbing workers off the streets and throwing them into immigration prisons. They tracked ICE vehicles, alerted residents to raids, and mobilized protesters to defend their communities. In January, ICE and CBP agents murdered Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti. It was in response to this state violence that workers and youth mobilized to defend their immigrant neighbors. This included mass demonstrations in January that raised the call for a general strike.

And what is the response of the state? The 15 protesters face federal conspiracy charges and the threat of years in prison. The ICE and CBP officers who murdered Good and Pretti have not even been charged. When pressed by reporters on why no charges had been filed against the

officers, US Attorney Daniel Rosen could only reply, “Those investigations are ongoing.” Democratic Governor Tim Walz and Democratic mayor of Minneapolis Jacob Frey have remained silent on the Minnesota 15 indictment.

Meanwhile, Congress, with the complicity of the Democratic Party, has just allocated another \$70 billion to ICE and CBP—a blank check funding the immigration Gestapo through the end of Trump’s term without a single restriction on its operations. Armed ICE officers have been deployed to airports all over the country.

On Tuesday, June 23, a federal judge in the Prairieland case in Texas sentenced eight anti-ICE protesters to prison terms ranging from 30 to 100 years, a combined 450 years. Daniel Sanchez-Estrada, who was not even at the protest, was sentenced to 30 years for moving anarchist magazines at the request of his wife after her arrest.

These sentences are much longer than the sentences handed down against the fascists who attacked the Capitol on January 6, 2021 in an effort to overturn the election and establish a dictatorship. Stewart Rhodes, the founder of the Oath Keepers, received 18 years. Enrique Tarrio, the leader of the Proud Boys, convicted of seditious conspiracy, received 22 years. Other Proud Boy leaders received 10 to 18 years. And Trump pardoned them. At the onset of his second term, he wiped their slates clean.

This is class justice. Fascist attacks on democratic rights are justified by the government, and even pardoned. But peaceful protest against genocide and police state attacks on immigrants are prosecuted as acts of terrorist conspiracy. There has been no word on the Prairieland sentences from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, Ilhan Omar, or Abdul El-Sayed. This should be front page news and an international scandal.

NSPM-7—A pseudo-legal blueprint for repression

What is the legal framework for this assault? 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, a fascistic blueprint to mobilize the entire repressive apparatus of the American state against all political opposition on the left.

NSPM-7 names “anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and anti-Christianity” as “common threads animating” domestic terrorism. It lists “extremism on migration, race, and gender” and “hostility towards those who hold traditional American views on family, religion, and morality” as signs of terrorist inclination. By treating political beliefs as the “animating threads” of terrorism, NSPM-7 provides a pseudo-legal justification for the persecution of individuals and organizations on the basis of their political convictions. It is a direct attack on the First Amendment.

“Antifa” is not a real organization. It has no membership roll, no officers, no offices, no financial filings. This is precisely the point. The charge of “Antifa terrorism” can be applied against anyone the government chooses to target—anyone protesting war, anyone on a picket line, anyone opposing the deportation regime.

In May 2026, the White House released a new Counterterrorism Strategy. The document identifies “Violent Left-Wing Extremists, including Anarchists and Anti-Fascists” as a primary target and pledges to “map them at home, identify their membership ... and use law enforcement tools to cripple them operationally before they can maim or kill.” It makes no reference whatsoever to right-wing or fascist terrorism.

War abroad, dictatorship at home

These attacks on democratic rights must be placed within their broader political context. They are the domestic expression of an ever-expanding war drive that is unfolding into a third world war.

In February, US imperialism launched a criminal war against Iran. Trump has threatened to annihilate the entire country, to send it “back to the Stone Ages.” The US military killed 160 schoolgirls in Minab with a Tomahawk missile. The human-rights monitor HRANA put the dead at 3,636, more than 1,700 of them civilians. Israel’s parallel offensive in Lebanon has killed at least 3,711 people and wounded more than 11,000.

Simultaneously, the European imperialists are escalating the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, a war that threatens nuclear confrontation. The Trump administration is intensifying attacks on Latin America, abducting and imprisoning the president of Venezuela and starving Cuba. The US has murdered some 200 fishermen in the Caribbean and Pacific.

The other side of this war drive is the scrapping of what remains of democratic forms and the establishment of dictatorial rule. War abroad requires the crushing of opposition at home. The drive to world war and the drive to dictatorship are inseparable.

The oligarchy

What underlies the collapse of American democracy? The oligarchic character of American society: a chasm between unfathomably rich billionaires and the vast mass of the population, which is sinking ever more deeply into poverty and economic insecurity.

Two weeks ago, Elon Musk became the world’s first trillionaire. The top 1 percent of the US population now controls more wealth than the entire bottom 90 percent combined. Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg have a combined wealth greater than the GDP of most nations on earth.

Democratic forms of rule cannot be maintained under such conditions of extreme social inequality. The political forms of rule are being transformed in accordance with the actual state of society, the underlying social relations. This is not simply a question of individuals. Trump is the personification of the oligarchy that rules America and is, in its political outlook, fundamentally fascistic.

The witch-hunt of Chinese researchers

This same process is expressed in the persecution of Chinese scientists, a vicious xenophobic campaign of harassment and intimidation orchestrated by the federal government and enabled by university administrations. At the University of Michigan, five Chinese researchers were charged with conspiracy and smuggling over routine customs paperwork violations. They were arrested, jailed for months without bail and deported to China. This witch-hunt led to the suicide in March of post-doctoral research scientist Danhao Wang, a brilliant young scholar driven to take his own life a day after interrogation by federal agents.

This xenophobic purge is deeply intertwined with the capitalist military-industrial complex and the drive toward war with China. The University of Michigan administration has been a central participant in this repression. President Domenico Grasso has collaborated with the FBI and federal prosecutors. In March, Grasso testified before Congress,

presenting the university as a partner in the national security state. He censured Faculty Senate chair Professor Derek Peterson for opposing Israel's war on Gaza, triggering an open letter signed by over 1,500 students, faculty, and staff.

The university spent at least \$850,000 to deploy plainclothes operatives from the private security firm City Shield to spy on pro-Palestinian protesters on and off campus. It banned Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, the first suspension of a legacy student organization in the university's history. It issued trespass bans, brought disciplinary charges, and collaborated with Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel, who brought state felony charges against protesters before being forced to drop them.

The Democratic Party's response

The response of state and national Democratic Party leaders to the indictment of the U-Mich Eight reveals the party's true character. In the end, the Democrats and the trade union bureaucracies represent the same ruling oligarchy as the Republicans.

The university administration that facilitated the surveillance, the disciplinary charges, and the visa revocations is dominated by Democratic appointees. The Biden administration laid the groundwork by smearing anti-genocide protesters as antisemites and supporting police repression of campus encampments.

State Party Chair Curtis Hertel declared he was "appalled by the details" in the U-Mich Eight indictment. Former chair Lon Johnson filed a formal request to investigate and expel five of the indicted individuals who had recently become registered Democrats, stating he saw " Hamas-like intimidation tactics." Representative Haley Stevens, running for US Senate, issued a statement that could have been drafted by the Department of Justice.

Abdul El-Sayed, the DSA-backed candidate for US Senate—the same campaign that employed U-Mich Eight defendant Mariam Odeh as a staffer—compared the Gaza genocide protesters to the January 6 fascists, effectively justifying the prosecution. He told reporters, "Yes, targeting people, their families, properties, businesses (is) wrong. But it's also wrong when January 6 terrorists do it." Representative Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian-American in Congress, described the indictment as containing "serious allegations" and framed her concern as a request for "answers from the Trump administration."

Governor Gretchen Whitmer, who has met with Trump and adopted a collaborative posture toward his administration, has said nothing. Bernie Sanders: silent. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: silent. Zohran Mamdani: silent. *Jacobin* magazine has not published a single article on the U-Mich Eight. Amir Makled, a Democratic nominee for the U-M Board of Regents who previously represented pro-Palestinian protesters: silent. Yousef Rabhi, Democratic Socialists of America member running for mayor of Ann Arbor: silent. Dave Zeglen, DSA member and candidate for City Council who describes himself as a "long-time pro-Palestine organizer": silent.

Growing political radicalization is developing among workers and youth. There is deepening disgust with both big business parties and a growing interest in socialism. This is an objective expression of the crisis of American and world capitalism—of immense social inequality, unending war and the collapse of democratic forms. But this radicalization has not yet found its own independent political expression. It has been partially reflected in the election of politicians who call themselves socialist, such as Zohran Mamdani and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

These figures seek to block the emergence of an independent movement

of the working class. They use radical rhetoric to channel working class opposition back into the Democratic Party. The task is not to elect more "socialist" Democrats. It is to build a revolutionary party that breaks completely from the Democrats and the entire capitalist political establishment.

Whatever radical rhetoric they occasionally spout, they defend capitalism and American imperialism. Mamdani supported scabbing operations during the Long Island Rail Road strike and met twice with Trump. Janeese Lewis George, the DSA member who will almost certainly be elected mayor of Washington D.C., has already pledged to work with Trump.

The SEP and the IYSSE are fundamentally different in class program, historical lineage and strategic orientation from so-called "left" organizations that orient to the Democratic Party.

Building an independent revolutionary movement of the working class

The trade union bureaucracy plays a critical and reactionary role. The Graduate Employees Organization leadership at U-Mich, dominated by the Democratic Socialists of America, allowed its contract to expire May 1 without calling a strike, and has done nothing in response to the frame-ups of the U-Mich Eight or the victimization of the Chinese scientists. Nurses at the University of Michigan have been working without a contract for nearly three months. Ann Arbor Public Schools teachers have been working without a contract for six months after nearly unanimously rejecting a tentative agreement.

In January and February, thousands of New York City nurses struck for 41 days. The nurses at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc have been on strike for just under 10 months. In May, Long Island Rail Road workers walked out for three days, shutting down the nation's largest commuter rail system.

American Axle workers in Three Rivers, Michigan went on strike for 14 days as the UAW bureaucracy worked to suppress a growing rebellion of auto parts workers across the Midwest. Nexteer workers in Saginaw voted down three UAW-backed tentative agreements and voted 86 percent to authorize a strike. Harvard academic workers struck for 40 days before being sent back to work by the UAW bureaucracy without a contract.

This fight requires the development of a new, genuinely revolutionary leadership for the working class. That is why the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality are building rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). These committees are new organizations of the working class, built from the shop floor up, whose aim is to remove the union bureaucracies and place power in the hands of the workers themselves.

A critical expression of this fight is the campaign of Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker, for president of the United Auto Workers. Lehman is a rank-and-file autoworker running on a socialist and internationalist program: for the expropriation of the auto industry, for the removal of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to the rank-and-file workers, and for the international unity of auto workers across the US, Mexico, Germany and the world. The working class needs its own leadership, its own organizations and its own party. That is what we are building.

The third American revolution

There is no pragmatic, easy solution to this crisis. Students who are really serious about fighting these attacks must educate themselves. They must read the history of the Marxist movement—the role of Stalin in betraying the Russian Revolution, the role of Trotsky in fighting for authentic Marxism and founding the Fourth International. This is the scientific understanding required to understand why the DSA, the PSL and every other tendency that orients to the Democratic Party and the capitalist nation-state cannot and will not lead a fight against war and dictatorship.

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. What is remarkable is the lack of any serious promotion or coverage in the media. The bourgeoisie is hostile to the principles of the revolution. “All men are created equal.” These words are a threat to the oligarchy. The Declaration of Independence states that “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.” The ruling class wants this forgotten.

The first American Revolution of 1776 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. The second American Revolution of 1861-1865, the Civil War, destroyed chattel slavery. The third American Revolution must be a socialist revolution—not just here, but all over the world.

As Leon Trotsky wrote in the Transitional Program, “The historic crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.” The decay of bourgeois democracy, the collapse of reformist and Stalinist organizations and the treachery of the labor bureaucracy are all expressions of this crisis of leadership. Democratic rights can be defended only through the independent mobilization of the international working class in a fight against capitalism and a struggle for socialism.

Join the fight

We call on students to join and build the IYSSE as an international revolutionary socialist youth movement. The fight against repression cannot be won on the campus alone. The working class is the revolutionary force in society. Students must turn to the working class, and the working class must be armed with a socialist and internationalist program.

The prosecution of the U-Mich Eight, the Minnesota 15, and the Prairieland defendants is an attack on the entire working class. The methods being tested on students today will be used against striking autoworkers, teachers and logistics workers tomorrow. 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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