

At town hall, students, workers denounce University of Michigan–Los Alamos nuclear weapons data center

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On October 1, the University of Michigan (U-Mich) held a town hall at Ann Arbor Marriott Ypsilanti on a proposed U-Mich–Los Alamos National Laboratory data center in Ypsilanti Township. Roughly 200 people attended under heavy police presence. Admission was restricted to advance registrants.

The panel consisted of Project Lead Steven Ceccio, U-Mich Professor of Engineering, along with other university administrators and a DTE Energy executive. Ceccio stated that the facility would “strike the best balance” between U-Mich’s research ambitions and the community’s interests.

One resident, who did not give his name, declared, “I don’t want to see nuclear weapons development anywhere.” The same speaker tied the project to the assault on democratic rights, saying:

Twice in the past year, University of Michigan police with the FBI have been kicking down doors on my block and dragging kids away for practicing their constitutional right to free speech. That officer right there went after some of my graduate students today on the Diag.

Both parties of the ruling class were represented: Heather Smiley, the Republican opponent of Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, and a speaker from the U-Mich Lecturers’ Employee Organization (LEO) who was promoting Democratic state representative Jimmie Wilson.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality intervened to place this opposition on a socialist foundation. Below is the statement issued by the IYSSE:

Stop the University of Michigan nuclear weapons data center

The University of Michigan and Los Alamos National Laboratory are proposing a \$1.25 billion nuclear weapons facility on 144 acres along the Huron River in Ypsilanti Township, across the street from the Ford Rawsonville Plant—a fortified federal installation whose central purpose is to simulate, modernize and develop new variants of the American nuclear arsenal. It is a war project, and it must be stopped.

Asked at a January open house whether the facility would be used

for nuclear weapons research, Los Alamos Deputy Director J. Patrick Fitch said, “The short answer is yes.” The data center is a military project with an academic fig leaf: a 50,000-square-foot “Academic Research Facility” bolted onto a 240,000-square-foot classified national security installation. At a September 9 town hall, university officials confirmed that the facility’s computing resources will be split 90 percent for Los Alamos and just 10 percent for the university.

The real costs

The facility will draw up to 100 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 75,000 to 100,000 homes. Its cooling systems will consume up to one million gallons of fresh water daily—enough for more than 3,000 households—siphoned from the same utility serving the civilian population.

The project will pay no property taxes. The development will contribute nothing to local schools, roads or first responders, while Ypsilanti Township is expected to absorb the costs of any emergency response to the facility.

The jobs promise has collapsed. The university expanded the project from 20 to 144 acres while the projected permanent on-site workforce shrank from 200 to as few as 30 or 35 positions.

A project of war and dictatorship

It is not a matter of moving this project somewhere else. The problem is not basically the location, but the project itself and the social order that produces it.

The data center is part of the expanding global war being driven by American imperialism, which includes the war against Iran, the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza. These wars are metastasizing, and are ultimately directed against nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Democratic establishment have worked to transform the state into a computational hub for the military-industrial complex, using the Michigan Strategic Fund and CHIPS Act subsidies to reshore military supply chains.

The University of Michigan's role in the war drive is inseparable from its assault on democratic rights on campus. The administration collaborated in the federal prosecution of the U-Mich Eight, eight pro-Palestinian students and employees indicted in June on conspiracy charges, who face up to 20 years behind bars. It banned Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE) and hired private investigators to spy on activists on and off campus. The University of Michigan was an epicenter of the nationwide crackdown on student opposition to the Gaza genocide. The central demand of the students was that the university divest from Israel, with which U-Mich maintains deep financial and research ties.

The university fired and facilitated the prosecution of five Chinese scholars on trumped-up charges, and it suppressed news of the suicide of Danhao Wang, a 31-year-old postdoctoral researcher who took his own life on March 19, the day after he was questioned by ICE and Customs and Border Patrol agents. A week after Wang's death, U-Mich President Domenico Grasso boasted to a congressional committee of his top-secret clearance and of having "acted swiftly and decisively" to terminate the five researchers' visas.

AI is being employed by the Trump administration to carry out the police occupations of cities, the persecution of immigrant and the construction of a system of mass detention. The same technology that could plan abundance for all is being turned into an instrument of dictatorship.

Who owns the technology?

Opposition to this war project must not be conflated with opposition to artificial intelligence itself. AI is a revolutionary advance in humanity's productive forces, holding the potential to cure disease, help orchestrate the complex reorganization of society's energy infrastructure necessary to resolve the climate crisis and make possible a planned economy that provides for all.

The problem is not the technology, but the social relations of the capitalist system to which it is subordinated. In the hands of the working class, in a socialist society, AI would be turned to human need. Under the control of the corporate oligarchy, it is used to destroy jobs, increase exploitation and escalate war. The working class must take hold of the data centers, the computing power, the AI systems, and wrest them from the class that has monopolized them.

Bernie Sanders and other "left" Democrats have promoted a "freeze AI" campaign and a data center moratorium that leaves ownership of the technology in the hands of the ruling class. In September, Sanders shared a platform with the fascist Steve Bannon and January 6 coup organizer Amy Kremer at the "Pro-Human Assembly" on AI, where Bannon called for expelling all Chinese nationals from US labs. Sanders voiced no opposition to this xenophobia, giving it his tacit approval.

Socialism AI (ai.wsws.org), which was established by the *World Socialist Web Site* to give users access to the assembled knowledge of the world socialist movement, shows how AI can advance the fight against war, dictatorship and inequality.

A warning to protesters

The military-nuclear project cannot be stopped by appeals to the university administration or to the Democratic Party. Democratic politicians, including Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, are attempting to attach themselves to the community opposition and adopt the protest as part of their election campaigns.

This is a trap. They will channel the anger of Ypsilanti Township residents back into the dead end of the Democratic Party—into petitions, hearings and "community input" sessions that change nothing while the project proceeds. The movement must not be subordinated to any politician or party of the ruling class.

Our demands

This is not a question of stopping one project in one township. It is a national and international question, requiring a struggle against the entire existing political and economic order.

What is required is an independent movement of the working class in opposition to the capitalist system and its two parties. The working class produces the technology, and it is the only class with the power to take hold of it and utilize it to meet the needs of humanity for peace, equality and economic security.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality support the opposition of Ypsilanti Township residents to this project, and we call for its cancellation. We put forward the following demands:

- Stop the U-Mich-Los Alamos nuclear weapons data center. No nuclear weapons research, simulation or development in Ypsilanti Township or anywhere else.
- No militarization of the university. End all classified research, all defense contracts and all collaboration between the University of Michigan and the military-intelligence apparatus.
- Full transparency and democratic control. All communications between the university and the township must be made public.
- Expropriate the technology monopolies and dismantle the military-industrial complex. The computing power, the data centers and the AI systems must be taken out of the hands of the corporations and the Pentagon and placed under the democratic control of the working class. They must be directed to human need and the planning of the world economy.

What you can do

Build a rank-and-file committee of workers, students and residents fighting this project. Take this statement to your workplace, your classroom and your neighbors. Contact the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact