

IIT Bombay unleashes police on grieving parents and student protesters

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Sunday, October 18, marked one month since Sahil Wakode, a 22-year-old second-year BTech student at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, took his own life in despair. Wakode was found dead in his hostel room on September 18, hours after he was allegedly caught using his phone during a mid-semester examination. He was the third student to die by suicide at IIT Bombay this year, and the tenth across the IIT system in 2026.

To mark this tragic day, Wakode's parents, Ravindra and Sonali Wakode—who have been waging a hunger strike at Azad Maidan, some 30 kilometres from the IIT Bombay campus—attempted to revisit the institute to seek accountability from its administration. His father submitted a letter to the Registrar. Instead of showing the slightest sympathy to the distraught parents and to the students who had maintained a month-long protest at the “Justice Corner” just outside the institute's main gate, the IIT Bombay administration unleashed the police.

More than 100 Mumbai Police personnel, together with IIT security, private security staff and plainclothes operatives, descended on the campus. The visiting parents were detained along with 22 students at the protest site. The police then proceeded to demolish the protest site. The arrested protesters were taken away in two buses, all of them subsequently released. Students alleged that the first round of detentions began around 2 a.m., when police vans first entered the campus. When protesters began recording the police, they were detained. A second round of detentions followed after the students resumed their sit-in.

The protesters described a brutal police assault. “They kicked us. They literally kicked us in the stomach. My pants were entirely torn. There was hair-pulling and choking, and I was pulled by my neck. The policewoman hit me on my head,” one student recounted. Several protesters sustained bruises and other injuries.

Deepali Salve of the All India Independent Scheduled Castes Association (AIISCA), who participated in the protest, alleged that police assaulted demonstrators during both rounds of detentions, denied medical treatment to injured students, and prevented them from contacting others.

The police violence unleashed against protesters by the IIT Bombay administration replicates, on a smaller scale, the violent response of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to recent protests by workers and youth in Delhi and its industrial suburbs. Draconian repression has now become the norm as noted in an earlier WSWs article. So far this year, three students at IIT Bombay, including Wakode, have died by suicide, yet the

institute's administrators have shown not an iota of contrition or made any sincere effort to investigate these deaths.

A diversionary invocation of caste

Wakode was a Dalit, and his parents have alleged caste-based discrimination and harassment by Professor Suryanarayana Doolla, who reportedly seized Wakode's paper, escorted him from the examination hall and threatened him with suspension before any disciplinary committee could examine the matter. The corporate media and various “left” and lower-caste rights groups have seized upon the caste dimension and proclaimed it the central issue.

Caste discrimination is endemic in India and even in elite institutions it is present at least in indirect form. But the fixation on the caste allegation is reactionary, as it detracts from the central problem: the oppressive academic atmosphere and the practice of pitting students against one another in a relentless competition for grades that prevail at the IITs.

The caste framing, promoted by the bourgeois parties and their pseudo-left hangers-on, divides students along caste lines and obscures the fact that the brutal pressure of the examination-and-grading regime bears down on *all* students, regardless of caste. It substitutes an identity-based grievance for a Marxist class-based analysis, and thereby disarms the students before the very system that is crushing them.

IIT Bombay, like every other educational institution, is geared towards supplying skilled labour to capitalist enterprises, so as to ensure they are “competitive,” i.e. profitable. The students are overwhelmingly the children of aspirational middle-class families. Many of them have poured their life savings into their children's coaching, beginning as early as the eighth grade, to prepare them for the grueling entrance examinations. Once admitted to the IITs, students face immense pressure, and many experience severe mental stress.

The IITs are, as one recent graduate put it, a pressure cooker. As many as 73 IIT students died by suicide or unnatural death between September 2021 and August 2026. IIT Kanpur's estimated suicide rate of 19.8 per 100,000 students is higher even than Japan's, the highest among college students in the world.

Wakode's suicide reveals the utterly degraded character of

India's educational system, which capitalism has reduced at its higher echelons to insane competition—first for admission, then for jobs. More than 1.5 million students appeared for the JEE (Main) in 2026, competing for barely 18,000 BTech degree seats. Meanwhile, India's central government spends far more per annum on the military in pursuit of the ruling class' great-power ambitions (in excess of \$90 billion), than all levels of the Indian state spend on primary and secondary education (about \$60 billion). So deplorable are conditions in India's public schools that even many impoverished working class families make great sacrifices to send their children to private schools, where resources are scarce and rote-learning the norm.

Under capitalism, the right to a free, quality education at all levels, including university, is not a basic democratic right. Education is a commodity, rationed by the ability to pay and by the needs of the profit system, in which everything must be done rapidly because "time is money." The ruling class has no interest in the intellectual development of the mass of young people; it requires only a thin layer of technically trained labour to staff its corporations, and a vast reserve army of the unemployed to discipline the rest.

An international crisis

The protests over Wakode's suicide have taken place within the context of a broader movement that has seen millions of Indian youth join protests in recent months—first over the BJP government's corrupt management of the brutal university entrance-exam system and more recently against the Modi government's attempt to purge the electoral rolls of millions of impoverished working people, especially Muslims and Dalits.

This is itself part of a wider youth radicalization. In France, secondary school students have been blockading their schools since mid-September, protesting overcrowded and dilapidated classrooms, teacher shortages and the Parcoursup admissions system. These protests have unfolded as the government implements €54 billion in austerity measures while directing tens of billions of euros toward military spending in a reckless drive toward war with nuclear-armed Russia.

On Saturday, October 17, around 800,000 people took to the streets across France. Two students each lost a hand as a result of police grenade explosions, and more than 6,000 people, the vast majority of them minors, have been arrested since late September.

In Belgium, high school students have blockaded schools across Wallonia and Brussels to oppose €500 million in education cuts, rising tuition fees and the abolition of free school meals. Over 200 people, again mostly minors, were arrested in the first week alone. In Albania, a student movement that began with a few hundred protesters outside the Ministry of Education has grown into a broad-based movement against the entire government of Prime Minister Edi Rama. It has been met with tear gas, water cannons, batons and rubber bullets.

Everywhere, the anger of young people is directed against the

same social injustices produced by crisis-ridden capitalism: austerity, social inequality, police repression, anti-immigrant and communal reaction, militarisation and war. Everywhere, the ruling class and its state answers with the same brutality.

The critical question facing young people opposed to the social catastrophe being produced by capitalism is to turn to the working class. It is the working class that alone has the social power to rally all the progressive elements in society behind it in a struggle to overthrow the capitalist oligarchy and reorganize socio-economic life so that society's resources are used to meet social needs not enrich the few.

In India, the turn to the working class means assisting it in breaking free of the Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and their respective trade union fronts—and building new organizations of genuine class struggle. The Stalinists are an integral part of the capitalist establishment. While waving red flags and in the name of fighting the Hindu supremacist BJP, they have systematically suppressed the class struggle for decades and subordinated the working class to the Congress Party, till recently the bourgeoisie's preferred party of national government, and a raft of right-wing casteist and ethno-chauvinist parties that similarly support "pro-investor" reform and the Indian ruling class' anti-China military-strategic alliance with US imperialism. The result has been only to strengthen the Modi-led BJP, communal reaction and the ruling class as a whole.

The turn to the working class also means a turn to Marxism. This is because it is through the assimilation of Marxism, the science of the class struggle, and its contemporary expression Trotskyism, that the working class will find the theoretical and political weapons it needs to overthrow capitalism, emancipate itself, and eliminate war and want.



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