

Police arrest four anti-genocide protesters at the University of Michigan

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On August 28, four anti-genocide protesters at the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus were arrested by police during a peaceful "die-in" protest led by the Tahrir Coalition of student groups against the genocide in Gaza. The demonstration demanded an end to the genocide and called on the U-Mich administration to end its investments in the Israeli economy. The roughly 50 protesters lay at the center of the university's quad (the Diag) with rags painted red and signs depicting victims of the US/Israel-led genocide.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan unequivocally denounces the attack on the protesters as an assault on the democratic rights of all workers and youth.

Before the arrests, reporters for the WSWS and members of the IYSSE visited the protest and spoke with students and workers. Protesters expressed grave concern over U-Mich's new policies and the attack on their democratic rights. One protester employed by U-Mich mentioned police had occupied the nearby library at the center of the Diag hours before the protest commenced. Others expressed disgust and concern about a hiring ban, targeting 11 U-Mich student protesters.

While exact numbers have not been reported, dozens of local and U-Mich police were visibly stationed and patrolling across the entire campus before and after the protest, with at least two dozen surrounding the protest hours before the arrests.

In videos captured and posted on Twitter and YouTube by independent journalist Brendan Gutenschwager (@BGOOnTheScene), the army of police assembled around the protest moved in to announce over a megaphone that sitting in the Diag is illegal and in violation of "Section 750.552 of Michigan compiled law trespass after warning" for impeding foot traffic. According to this law, violators can be charged with a "misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than 30

days or by a fine of not more than \$250.00, or both."

Minutes after the announcement, the small army of police began charging protesters as Zionist counterprotesters encircling the edges of the protest chanted, "Bring them home" (a reference to hostages held in Gaza). Anti-genocide protesters were pushed out of the way as police grabbed those sitting down.

One protester was dragged across the ground while two other officers were seen forcing a woman to the ground as one officer pinned her with her elbow. Those arrested were surrounded by dozens of police, who physically separated them from other protesters. Following the arrests, police were seen ripping signs out of protesters' hands while confronting the remaining protesters.

When asked by anti-genocide demonstrators why Zionist counterprotesters were not being targeted by police, officers claimed they were allowed to be on campus, with one remarking, "They're just standing there."

The university administration and the police claim that three of the four arrested were unaffiliated with the university, while the fourth was identified as a temporary employee of U-Mich. Police have reportedly released those arrested.

The protest coincided with U-Mich's Festifall event, a back-to-school social event that allows student clubs to showcase themselves to the student body. During Festifall, the IYSSE at U-Mich spoke with dozens of students and workers on the protest and the arrests. They expressed widespread opposition to the attack on democratic rights, the Gaza genocide and US plans for World War III.

In speaking with a member of the IYSSE, a student, who asked to remain anonymous, commented on the arrests: "The universities of the United States have been cracking down on their students for protesting the genocide in Gaza for a few months now, and yesterday's

arrests on the Diag seem to indicate the trend will continue into the 2024-25 academic year. The actions taken by and on behalf of the universities of this country to halt these protests should be viewed with disgust and anger.”

She continued, emphasizing the implications of the arrests, “We, as citizens of the United States, are entitled to the right to protest peacefully under the First Amendment, and the University is purposefully infringing upon that right via its policies. They are stripping us of our rights, to slow dissent and keep us in line.”

When asked about how these attacks impact the working class, she said:

This is in line with a trend of rising authoritarian ideologies worldwide that exist to keep the ruling class wealthy and powerful and protect it from an increasingly disgruntled working class. These workers, the general population, and especially the disenfranchised youth of the world yearn for change and the defunding of Israel.

The working class’s dissatisfaction will only continue to grow as our rights and livelihoods are attacked and stripped away, and we are fated to come into conflict with the world the authoritarians are striving for. We must organize and broaden these protests so that we are no longer isolated in pockets around the world, and we must vocalize our statements to those who will listen. Hate and authoritarianism must not win. Even if the situation worldwide is bleak, we must fight.

Palestine will be free.

The police crackdown came just days after the university administration unveiled revisions to its conduct policies that allow the “university” to file a complaint against a student with practically no restrictions. Previously, all complaints about misconduct had to come from U-Mich staff members, faculty or students. These new policies provide legal cover to allow for outside consulting firms to gather information and file complaints and sanctions against students on behalf of the university.

These policy revisions and earlier ones targeting free speech and democratic rights adopt intentionally vague language, allowing the administration to ban any protest, gathering, picket line or demonstration it deems disruptive, effectively banning all forms of protest on the

campus. Similar policies have been implemented at other major universities, including the University of California, Columbia University, New York University and Rutgers University. However, the policies at the University of Michigan are particularly far-reaching. There can be little doubt that the university’s Board of Regents, which is packed with operatives of the Democratic and Republican parties, many of them millionaires, discussed these policies at the highest levels of the state and Democratic Party.

Workers and youth must see the developments at the University of Michigan as a harbinger of an escalation of the attack on free speech on campuses across the country and even more violent attacks by the ruling class on the right of workers to protest and strike. They are a response not only to the overwhelming popular opposition to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, which has already claimed over 186,000 lives, but also growing popular anger about social conditions more broadly.

At the Stellantis-owned Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), just an hour from the U-Mich Ann Arbor campus, nearly 2,500 workers, two-thirds of the plant’s workforce, have been laid off. These layoffs are part of a global wave of attacks on jobs and living conditions carried out by the ruling class as it lurches toward a Third World War, targeting not only Russia and Iran but also China. Neither this emerging global war, of which the genocide in Gaza is part, nor the assault on living standards it entails is compatible with democratic rights.

This development toward world war cannot be stopped through appeals to the ruling class and university administrations. Instead, students must base their struggles on the international working class, the principal revolutionary force in society, and fight to mobilize it independently against war, the threat of dictatorship and fascism and their root cause, the capitalist system.



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