University of Michigan police ban IYSSE/SEP campaigners from campus

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As part of an expanding campaign by colleges and universities across the US to suppress protests and dissent, four supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) were stopped from campaigning and banned from entering University of Michigan property for one year by campus police on September 9.

The team had been campaigning for a public lecture by Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Joseph Kishore at the University of Michigan the next day titled, "Genocide, war, fascism and the 2024 elections: The socialist perspective." The event was sponsored by the University of Michigan chapter of the IYSSE. SEP supporters collected 20,000 signatures to place Kishore on the Michigan ballot, including from hundreds of UM students.

The campaign team of three, who had set up a table, were leafletting for the meeting on the Diag at the center of campus. A UM police officer, Collin, approached the campaign team. She told the campaigners they had to have a permit to table and asked them to move off university property. She was evidently singling out the SEP/IYSSE because she did not approach other groups soliciting in the area to inquire if they had proper authorization.

The campaign team members complied and moved off the Diag to a spot near a main public sidewalk, where another table had been set up by a Democratic Party-affiliated voter information group.

While distributing leaflets by the sidewalk, a pro-Zionist professor of history employed by University of Michigan, Viktor Lieberman, approached members of the campaign team and attempted to instigate a confrontation. He told a campaign team member to "drop dead" after refusing a leaflet. He then told members of the campaign team that the Israeli assault on Palestinians in Gaza was the least deadly urban combat invasion in history. When campaign team members attempted to disengage, he continued to harangue them.

Lieberman left but soon returned and tried to continue to provoke members of the team, before leaving again.

Very shortly after, Officer Collin, who initially asked the campaign team to get off the Diag, returned. She claimed the campaign table was still on university property and would cite the members of the team, who had recently been joined by a fourth SEP supporter, for trespass.

Highlighting the fact that this action had official sanction, a supervising campus police officer arrived on the scene soon after.

The four SEP/IYSSE supporters were asked to hand over their IDs and were given written warnings stating that "future entry into the following areas (any land or building owned or leased by the University of Michigan) will subject you to arrest for trespassing." The ban, the warning stated, would last for one year.

When members of the campaign team were asked if they would be allowed to continue distributing leaflets off campus on public streets in Ann Arbor, they were told they would need permission from the local police, an implied threat of further harassment.

The SEP and IYSSE are planning a legal challenge to the UM ban on supporters. It should be noted that presidential election campaign activity is protected by federal statute and stipulates stiff penalties for those who interfere.

The attack on the SEP/IYSSE supporters at UM parallels a stepped up attack on free speech at campuses across the US.

It follows the arrest of four University of Michigan

students on August 28 for conducting a "die in" on the Diag to protest the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Police claimed the students violated Michigan trespass statutes by "impeding" foot traffic. The arrests were accompanied by a violent police assault on protesters, with officers ripping signs out their hands. One protester was dragged across the ground. Two others were seen pinning a woman to the ground, while one pinned her with her elbow.

The arrests came just days after the university administration unveiled changes to its conduct policies that allow the "university" to file a complaint against a student with practically no restrictions. The latest anti-democratic rule changes follow the adoption of draconian policies allowing the administration to ban any protest or gathering it deems "disruptive." In other words, the campus administration has effectively curtailed free speech.

Other universities have imposed similar intensely undemocratic measures. University of California President Michael Drake, for example, has issued a series of new directives banning encampments, banning masks, banning the obstruction of paths, and mandating the persecution of students charged with disrupting "orderly operations" on campus on academic charges.

At University of Southern California and elsewhere, students have been forced to write "apology letters" for their actions during protests. At many campuses, entire groups have been targeted for persecution, including Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP).

Unilateral and indiscriminate campus bans have emerged as a major tool for intimidating and censoring students, faculty and others. "The bans were incredibly punitive and profoundly unfair," said Rachel Lederman, Senior Counsel with the Center for Protest Law & Litigation, describing bans that took effect at UC Santa Cruz in May, which are the subject of an ongoing civil rights lawsuit. "They went into effect on the spot, instantly cutting students and faculty off from classes, jobs, and other school resources, such as meal plans and health care. On-campus residents were rendered homeless. Academic performance suffered."

The bans were also "unconstitutional and overbroad, depriving students and faculty of their due process rights," said Chessie Thacher, Senior Staff Attorney at the ACLU Foundation of Northern California.

The SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* call on workers and youth to mobilize against the police state assault on free speech on campuses.