

Oppose the persecution of Momodou Taal! Mobilize the working class to defend democratic rights!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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Cornell University international student and graduate instructor Momodou Taal faces imminent final suspension and deportation for participating in protests against the genocide in Gaza.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the student and youth organization of the Socialist Equality Party, denounces this outrageous assault on democratic rights. It must be opposed by all students and the entire working class.

On Friday, Taal submitted a final appeal of his suspension to Cornell's provost, following the rejection of his appeal by the vice president of Student and Campus Life on Thursday. If this appeal fails and he is suspended from the university, Cornell knows this will entail a revocation of his F-1 visa, requiring that he leave the United States.

The moves against Taal are a massive escalation in the year-long campaign to suppress opposition on campuses that is setting a very dangerous precedent. As Taal's immigration lawyer Eric Lee said in a statement on the case, Cornell "is blurring the line between academic institution and enforcement arm of the Department of Homeland Security."

Taal, a British-Gambian student, was suspended on Monday for his participation in a peaceful protest on September 18, where he demonstrated against US military contractors recruiting on campus. The protest specifically targeted Boeing and L3Harris, two companies that profit from US imperialism and Israel's genocidal war on Gaza.

The university's claim that the suspension was based on violations of campus policies is a transparent cover for its real motivation: suppressing opposition to the Israeli regime's war on Gaza.

As Taal wrote in a letter to the Cornell Office of Global Learning Thursday, "I am a scholar, and I am under threat here in America because I am defending the basic human rights of the people of Palestine while participating in peaceful protests on a university campus. I have a valid visa. I have a right to be at Cornell and I have a right to express myself."

Taal has received widespread support from students and faculty. On Wednesday, more than 130 students and supporters gathered outside Cornell's administration building to demand the reversal of his suspension.

The move to suspend and deport Taal is part of a broader assault on democratic rights under conditions of escalating global war.

On Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the UN General Assembly, defending the genocide in Gaza, which is now expanding into the West Bank and Lebanon. Shortly after Netanyahu spoke, Israel launched a massive bombing campaign targeting buildings in Beirut, Lebanon's capital.

At the same time, the US and NATO powers are discussing allowing Ukraine to use long-range NATO missiles to target Russian territory, which threatens to provoke an uncontrolled escalation of global war. As the WSWs wrote on Thursday, "any retaliation by Russia would be the means to orchestrate a massive escalation of the war, accompanied by sweeping attacks on democratic rights, akin to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, but on an even greater scale."

Over the past year, mass protests and student-led demonstrations against US-backed Israeli war crimes have been met with repression and violent crackdowns.

The campuses have opened in the fall semester amidst a police-state atmosphere, with major new restrictions placed on basic democratic rights across the country.

In Michigan, the Democratic Party-led state government is pressing felony charges against 11 students and residents for participating in pro-Palestinian demonstrations at the University of Michigan. And local police have banned Socialist Equality Party supporters from distributing leaflets on the campus.

The University of California has banned the wearing of face masks, used both for COVID-19 protection and to prevent protesters from being identified and victimized, while Columbia University has imposed a total ban on encampments and restricted campus access to individuals with university IDs. New York University has updated its policies to conflate criticism of Zionism with antisemitism, effectively banning protests against Israel's genocidal actions, while Rutgers University now requires a "Free Expression Notification Form" to protest and has blacklisted Students for Justice in Palestine.

The Democrats and Republicans, the two parties of the corporate and financial oligarchy, fully support the escalation of the attack on opponents of genocide and war. They have both participated in the slander of protests as "antisemitic," while state and local governments under Democratic and Republican governors and mayors have sent cops onto campuses to arrest and beat up students.

While Trump is seeking to build a fascist movement centered on attacking immigrants and refugees, the Biden-Harris administration has financed, armed and politically justified the ongoing genocide in Gaza and is now escalating the war against Russia in Ukraine.

The experiences of nearly one year of protests against the genocide in Gaza must be assimilated. The perspective, promoted by various organizations of the middle class in and around the Democratic Party, that mass opposition will force a change in course by the ruling elites, has led to a dead end. The bitter lesson of the anti-war movements of the past is that any movement that is subordinated to the Democratic Party and limited to the framework of middle class protest politics will inevitably be manipulated by the bourgeoisie.

The escalating assault on democratic rights on

campuses is motivated by a fear within the ruling class that opposition to the war will be connected to the growing struggles of workers in the United States and internationally. The measures being taken against students will be used to suppress and criminalize all opposition to the policies of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

The victimization of Taal for protesting Cornell's ties to military contractors, including Boeing, takes place amidst an ongoing strike by 33,000 Boeing workers. The strike followed a vote by more than 94 percent to reject a contract backed by the IAM union apparatus, revealing the enormous opposition in the working class to the escalating assault on jobs and wages.

Five hundred workers at another military contractor, Eaton in Michigan, are on strike after rejecting two contracts backed by the UAW. And this coming week, a contract for 45,000 dockworkers across the US East Coast expires, and a strike would pose a serious threat to the global operations of American imperialism.

The IYSSE calls on all students at Cornell and at campuses throughout the country to oppose the attack on Taal. We demand his immediate reinstatement and an end to all threats to revoke his visa. We call for the dropping of all charges against pro-Palestinian protesters across the country and an end to the criminalization of free speech.

The defense of democratic rights and opposition to war, however, can only be successful through the mobilization of that social force that has the power to oppose the capitalist ruling elite: the working class, in the US and throughout the world.

The IYSSE, as the student movement of the SEP (US) and the International Committee of the Fourth International, is fighting to build a new, socialist anti-war movement, firmly grounded in the principles of revolutionary Marxism and dedicated to mobilizing the international working class against capitalism and for socialism.



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