

New Trump executive order tightens noose on free speech at American universities

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Late Wednesday, the Trump administration announced an executive order aimed at transforming American universities into a surveillance and enforcement arm of the military-intelligence-immigration enforcement apparatus.

Titled “Additional measures to Combat Anti-Semitism,” the order declares the administration’s goal of “using all available and appropriate legal tools, to prosecute, remove, or otherwise hold to account the perpetrators of unlawful anti-Semitic harassment and violence.” Trump and his fascist advisers have falsely equated all criticism of Israel as antisemitic and “terroristic.”

The latest order contains a section aimed at chilling all speech critical of Israel among students and faculty. Section 3(e) reads:

In addition to identifying relevant authorities to curb or combat anti-Semitism generally required by this section, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Education, and the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with each other, shall include in their reports recommendations for familiarizing institutions of higher education with the grounds for inadmissibility under 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(3) [security and terrorist grounds] so that such institutions may monitor for and report activities by alien students and staff relevant to those grounds and for ensuring that such reports about aliens lead, as appropriate and consistent with applicable law, to investigations and, if warranted, actions to remove such aliens.

There is hardly a clause of this paragraph that does not bristle with hostility to free speech and democratic rights. Employing threatening language, it notes that universities must be “familiarized” with the most draconian part of the Immigration and Nationality Act pertaining to terrorism and “unlawful activity.” Section 1182(a)(3) renders a non-citizen inadmissible to enter the US if they engage in “terrorist

activity,” “any other unlawful activity” or “any activity a purpose of which is the opposition to, or the control or overthrow of, the Government of the United States by force, violence, or other unlawful means.”

In a fact sheet published Thursday accompanying the latest executive order, Trump made clear that the order is aimed at chilling speech across all campuses: “To all the resident aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you. I will also quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathisers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before.”

The fact sheet continues: “Immediate action will be taken by the Department of Justice to protect law and order, quell pro-Hamas vandalism and intimidation, and investigate and punish anti-Jewish racism in leftist, anti-American colleges and universities.”

By pressuring universities to “monitor” and “report” students and staff to the Department of Homeland Security for deportation, the Trump administration’s order is directed not only against the speech of non-citizens (including green card holders), it also targets citizens by eviscerating the First Amendment right to listen to and discuss the left-wing views of non-citizens—a right recognized by the 1972 Supreme Court case *Kleindienst v. Ernest Mandel*.

Moreover, section 2 of the latest order calls for criminally prosecuting “perpetrators” without language limiting its application to non-citizens. Its reference to “otherwise holding to account” pro-Palestinian and left-wing students and staff has concerning and extra-legal undertones.

The order was praised by war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu, who posted on X: “On behalf of Israel and the Jewish people, I thank President Trump for his executive order to fight antisemitism and support for terrorism on American campuses.”

Students have begun to denounce the orders, noting that the attack on democratic rights has been prepared by university administrations in the 16 months of protest against the Gaza genocide since Israel’s response to the

events of October 7, 2023.

Momodou Taal, a Cornell student who overcame the university administration's threat to report him to DHS for protest activity last year, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "Cornell's heavy-handed approach to peaceful protest has paved the way for this executive order. If it wants to salvage its reputation as a harbor of free expression, Cornell must act now and forcefully defend its students."

Prahlad Iyengar, an MIT engineering student who has faced discipline for allegedly making Lockheed Martin representatives "feel unwelcomed" at a career fair event, told the WSWS:

Deportation for international students who stand for Palestine is a pretext to open the door for all critique of American empire. Most importantly it's an attempt to flood the news narrative in order to obscure their true goal: if you don't fit Trump's right-wing vision of "America" you will be deported, attacked, or threatened regardless of citizenship. It's rule by force and not by justice and dignity. These attempts to intimidate our movement by creating artificial divides which target international and undocumented community members will not deter us. We will continue to agitate for Palestine and for global liberation, and we will take care of our own. Our demands are popular, and supported by the supermajority of the MIT community, the Boston and Cambridge community, and the entire world. We are on the right side of history.

This is the second order since Trump's inauguration targeting freedom of speech. On January 20, Trump ordered the Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Secretary of State, Attorney General and Director of National Intelligence to:

recommend *any actions necessary* to protect the American people from the actions of foreign nationals who have undermined or seek to undermine the fundamental constitutional rights of the American people, including, but not limited to, our Citizens' rights to freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion protected by the First Amendment, who preach or call for sectarian violence, the overthrow or replacement of the culture on which our constitutional Republic stands, or who provide aid, advocacy, or support for foreign terrorists. (Emphasis

added)

The Socialist Equality Party has called for the formation of school, neighborhood and workplace committees to unite immigrant and non-immigrant workers and students to defend basic democratic rights. In a statement titled "Trump's first 7 days: the framework for presidential dictatorship," the SEP (US) wrote:

Such committees will serve as hubs for the dissemination of information and as the platform for mobilizing the population against Trump's dictatorial efforts to break apart families and eviscerate democratic rights.

The committees will bring together teachers, students, parents, workers and concerned neighbors of all backgrounds to plan lawful public responses to attacks on members of the community under the principle: "An injury to one is an injury to all." Wherever they function, committees will strive to break down all efforts by the two big business parties and the trade union bureaucracies to divide workers along immigration status or national background. They will expose the xenophobic lies of the corporate media by waging a campaign of mass political education aimed at rendering the population "wide awake" to the threat against democracy.

In these committees, the SEP and International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) will "introduce into the struggles ahead a political program aimed at connecting the defense of immigrants to the fight to defend the basic democratic rights of all" and "strive to transform the defense of immigrants into an offensive fight by the international working class against Trump and his source—the capitalist system."



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