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Hundreds rally in defense of Mahmoud Khalil in New York City: “There is fascism happening in this country”

Attend the IYSSE’s public meeting this week, “Free Mahmoud Khalil!”, Friday, March 14 at 6:30 p.m. at The Center (208 W 13th St., Room 310, New York City). An online meeting will be held Saturday with the Educators Rank-and-File Committee. [Click here to register.](#)



Hundreds rally in New York City to demand the release of Mahmoud Khalil, March 11, 2025.

On Tuesday, hundreds of people—including students, teachers and community members—rallied in New York City to demand the release of Mahmoud Khalil, a legal resident of the United States who has been kidnapped by the Trump administration for protesting the genocide in Gaza.

Khalil, a Columbia graduate, has not been charged with any crime, yet he remains incarcerated in an ICE detention facility in Louisiana, more than 1,000 miles away from his wife—an American citizen who is eight months pregnant with their child.

The kidnapping of Khalil is not an isolated incident but a harbinger of escalating repression. On Monday, the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights sent letters to 60 colleges and universities, warning that they are under investigation for alleged violations related to "antisemitic harassment and discrimination."

Far from opposing the Trump administration's attacks on democratic rights, members of the Democratic Party have responded with either perfunctory statements or complete silence. As of this writing, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who refuses to acknowledge the mass slaughter and forced starvation of Palestinians in Gaza as a "genocide," has yet to issue a statement condemning Khalil's detention.

At the rally, students and professors spoke with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about the unconstitutionality of Khalil's detention, the Democratic Party's role in paving the way for these attacks and the fascist transformation of the US government. Interviews have been lightly edited for clarity and content.

A graduate student said she came to the rally because "The genocide in Gaza has been ongoing and it is quite frankly inhumane to take political prisoners now for exercising their freedom of speech. That is not right.

Students are just trying to exercise their right to free speech. They are trying to look out for their families. They are trying to look out for their communities. Because of exercising their free speech and of their rights to [oppose] something that is inhumane, they now have to worry about if they can even go to school.

She continued:

[The Trump administration] are authoritarian pigs. They want to take our rights away. They want to take everyone's rights away. For people who think that the genocide in Gaza isn't going to ultimately end up affecting them, it is, it already has...

The [Democratic Party] should have done more [to protect democratic rights]. They didn't.

She added, "This could have stopped a long time ago. This should have stopped at its inception. It didn't, and I think regardless of the administration, multiple people have had a hand in it..."

On what way forward, the student concluded:

I think the current government within the United States needs to be abolished. I don't see room for reform. Reform is just another way to cover up for the same crimes. I think we are at a point where it has to go, and I think that is the only way forward. I understand that may sound radical to many, but if you look at the situation, I don't think there is another feasible solution there.

So pick your side. There is only one right one in my eyes.

An educator at the rally told the WSWS she came “to defend freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

There is fascism happening in this country and we are being suppressed, our press is being suppressed. We are being suppressed, and Mahmoud Khalil, who is a permanent [resident] of the United States, is being disappeared, just like every other fascist country does. So I am here because I am angry.

A student at New York University said it is “really horrific” how the Trump administration is “using Jewish identity as a way to promote pretty fascist and authoritarian policies, them saying, Shalom Mahmoud. They want people to blame Jewish people for fascism when it’s really that they want to suppress freedom of speech for everyone, particularly when it comes to American foreign policy and anything to do with the Middle East.”

Asked to comment on the role of the Biden administration and Democratic Party more broadly in paving the way for these attacks, he replied:

Oh, absolutely horrific. I mean, Biden, the rhetoric he was using was pretty much, you know, the speeches he was giving could have been given by Richard Nixon in the 60s and 70s. They smeared the student protesters who were protesting one of the worst crimes since World War II as comparable to the Charlottesville Nazis. That was Karrine Jean-Pierre, the press secretary said that. And this was a comparison Biden made himself multiple times. Utterly vile and horrific thing to say, particularly when Biden at least claimed Charlottesville was what got him to run for president again.



Students and community members call for the release of Mahmoud Khalil in New York City, March 11, 2025.

He continued:

And then Senator Rubio asked the Biden administration, ‘Can we deport Hamas supporters?’ Supposed Hamas supporters? And they said, ‘Yes.’ So every bit of suppression, the suppression of these university protests, suppression of freedom of speech, the use of riot police, NYPD Special Response Group, absolutely has paved the way for Trump to do this now.

When it comes to the Democratic Party of New York, I mean, that’s just horrific. You can say [Mayor] Eric Adams, ‘Well, you know, he’s his own entity,’ but between [Gov. Kathy] Hochul and the congressional leadership and [New York Rep.] Hakeem Jeffries, I mean, just absolutely horrific.

I think the Biden presidency really revealed a level of just rot in our institutions, and I think it made it clear that you know it made a lot of people cynical in a way that even the Trump presidency didn’t because the people we thought were our allies are proving themselves to be collaborators in this new regime.

I think what’s clear is that politics isn’t just every four years or every two years you pull a lever in the voting booth or touch a screen. The Democratic Party wants you to think that it’s limited to those circumstances, when really it’s organizing rallies, organizing your schools, your workplaces, etc. It should be a constant and it should be an independent activity done in solidarity with people on your... material level.

He concluded:

The Democratic Party, they are afraid to take a stance that is too pro-immigrant, that’s too pro-Palestine. They don’t want people to realize that, you know, once these rights are trampled now, they will be trampled for you.

This is the worst the situation has been since McCarthyism. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us—today, not a week from now, not months, not years from now. It’s today! They are trampling on what is right and sacred for us. Trump, you know, is seriously considering using the Insurrection Act to detain migrants. That’s effectively martial law.