

Latest attack on academic freedom

"Campus Watch" web site witch-hunts Middle Eastern studies professors in the US

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30 December 2002

A web site set up in September by right-wing columnist Daniel Pipes represents the latest attempt to stifle the growing opposition on American campuses to the Bush administration's "war on terrorism." Known as Campus Watch, it initially posted "dossiers" on eight targeted professors of Middle Eastern studies—all of them prominent in their field—who supposedly showed "bias" in their teaching and public statements. Their crimes included daring to suggest that US foreign policies may have contributed to the growth of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, or proposing that Israeli assaults on the Palestinians constitute oppression.

Attempting to smear any critics of US policies as unpatriotic, the web site offers two causes for the alleged bias: "First, academics seem generally to dislike their own country and think even less of American allies abroad. They portray U.S. policy in an unfriendly light." Their supposed anti-Americanism is then given the following racist explanation: "Second, Middle East studies in the United States has become the preserve of Middle Eastern Arabs, who have brought their views with them. Membership in the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), the main scholarly association, is now 50 percent of Middle Eastern origin. Though American citizens, many of these scholars actively disassociate themselves from the United States, sometimes even in public."

As soon as the web site posted the dossiers—which initially included email addresses, phone numbers and even photographs—the eight targeted professors were inundated with thousands of emails and phone calls, many of them hostile, including death threats. Several had their computers hacked into and taken over, to send out offensive messages falsely in their names.

Campus Watch was greeted with a wave of denunciations for setting up a McCarthy-style blacklist. Some 200 academics wrote in to support the eight professors, demanding that their names, too, be added to the web site's list. Shortly thereafter, Pipes announced a change in the Campus Watch format to remove the dossiers as a separate item, but retaining the eight profiles as a part of "surveys" of universities the web site is "monitoring" for supposed anti-American bias. Among the 31 universities currently listed, the University of North Carolina is cited for requiring incoming freshmen to read portions of the Koran.

At the same time, 180 supporters of the blacklisted professors were added to a new section of the web site, entitled "Solidarity

with Apologists" for lending support to "academics we identified as apologists for suicide bombings and militant Islam." No citations are posted to document how any of the original eight or their supporters endorsed suicide bombings or any other acts of terrorism. Pipes simply equates their opposition to Israeli aggression with support for suicide bombings. Retired psychology professor Zalman Amit of Concordia University in Montreal, one of the blacklisted professors' supporters, also correctly points out that Campus Watch has no listing of "supporters of apologists of Israeli atrocities and war crimes."

In a disingenuous attempt to deny accusations of McCarthyism, Pipes claims there is nothing wrong with criticizing the public statements and actions of his opponents. But there is no attempt to engage in a debate with his targets, or to document his charges. He simply posts selected writings and statements—many taken out of context—as evidence of anti-Americanism.

Typical of Pipes modus operandi is his November 12 column in the right-wing tabloid, the *New York Post*, entitled "Profs Who Hate America." He cites among others: MIT professor of linguistics, Noam Chomsky, for pointing to Iraqi oil as the real aim of the impending US attack on that impoverished country; Columbia University Professor Eric Foner, for comparing the Bush administration's doctrine of "preventive war" to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; and Yale Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh, for his statement that "if Saddam Hussein is a dictator, [Washington] created him."

The Campus Watch web site calls for alumni and legislators to withhold funding to offending universities. Martin Kramer, Pipes' co-thinker at the Middle East Forum think tank which officially sponsors Campus Watch, calls for the elimination of the federal Department of Education funding for Middle East Studies programs around the country and its replacement with Defense Department funding for language training aimed at developing current and future spies. A number of institutions, such as the Campus-Watch "surveyed" University of Michigan, have rejected such Defense Department programs. University of Michigan Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature and Culture Carol Bardenstein commented: "We didn't want our students to be known as spies in training."

A month after September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, Kramer indicted the entire Middle East Studies discipline

for having “manifestly failed to prepare the country for the possibility of a terrorist attack”—a charge designed to divert attention from the US government’s own role in allowing the September 11 attacks to go forward in spite of numerous warnings.

One of the most ominous features of the Campus Watch web site is its section entitled “Keep Us Informed,” which invites students to write in and anonymously report on their professors. Pipes defends the site by claiming it serves to broaden the range of views that are presented on campus. But far from encouraging students to openly challenge ideas with which they disagree, this establishment of a network of informers can only be aimed at imposing a uniformity of thought, through the threat of reprisals against those who don’t toe Pipes’ pro-government line. Pipes is attempting to create a campus version of the TIPS program floated by the Bush administration earlier this year to enlist US civilians to spy on their neighbors.

Pipes belongs to a variety of right-wing academics and pseudo-academics who specialize in providing an educated gloss to the pro-capitalist propaganda of the government and mass media. His father is the notorious anticommunist Richard Pipes, a Harvard “Sovietologist” to whom the media would turn for “expert” commentary on every development in the Soviet Union, in particular in the period leading up to its demise. As a member of Ronald Reagan’s National Security Council in the early 1980s, he advocated that the US prepare to conduct a winnable nuclear war against the USSR.

Similarly, son Daniel has traded on his family pedigree and his Harvard PhD to pass himself off as an expert on the Middle East, even though he has failed to hold any academic post of note. His real qualification for his numerous television and talk-show appearances is the reliability with which he can be counted on to spew out anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments.

In a 1990 article in the extreme right-wing *National Review*, Pipes warned of “the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and maintaining different standards of hygiene.... All immigrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most.” His recent book, with the fear-mongering title *Militant Islam Reaches America*, feeds prejudice by warning of a rapidly growing Muslim population planning to transform the United States into an Islamic theocracy based on Sharia law. In it, he states, “All Muslims, unfortunately, are suspect.”

The younger Pipes also served in the Reagan administration, and is currently a member of a Defense Department anti-terrorism task force. He is connected to such powerful Bush administration figures as Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz through the pro-Israel think tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP).

Of particular note is Pipes’ view of the role of academia. Discussing his alma mater in a recent interview, he said: “Until the Vietnam War, Harvard had always played the role of a patriotic institution. During Vietnam, Harvard, along with other educational institutions, transformed from a patriotic institution into an adversarial one.... There is no inherent reason that major universities must be at odds with the country as a whole, least of all in wartime.... [T]he presumption should be that one lines up

with one’s country.”

Under the common term “country,” Pipes falsely identifies the interests of the governing elite with those of the vast majority. Under conditions where society is far more polarized between rich and poor than during the Vietnam War era, today’s ruling elite is acutely aware of their need to squelch genuine debate and the popular opposition it engenders, as they embark upon even more reckless war policies than their predecessors in the 1960s.

The Campus Watch web site represents the latest—and to date most comprehensive attack—on academic freedom, using the vehicle of the Internet and the cover of an unofficial think tank (whose funding sources Pipes refuses to reveal) to publicize its blacklist. While none of the listed professors have lost their jobs, there is no way of measuring the extent of its chilling effect, in particular on untenured faculty who may hesitate to speak out for fear of being reported. A Women’s Studies conference at the State University of New York at New Paltz had its university funding withdrawn due to the participation of several pro-Palestinian speakers that was called to the university’s attention by Campus Watch.

Some commentators have expressed concern that Campus Watch citations could become the basis for drawing up criminal charges under the USA Patriot Act against the witch-hunted individuals.

Sami Al-Arian, a Palestinian professor of engineering holding tenure at the University of South Florida, remains suspended 15 months after Fox News publicized unsubstantiated allegations of his support for terrorism, similar to the charges Campus Watch makes against its targets. Pipes enthusiastically endorsed Al-Arian’s firing.

A year ago, another right-wing academic group, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), issued a listing of 40 professors and one university president whom it accused of being “short on patriotism.” The founder of ACTA is Lynne Cheney, wife of US Vice President Dick Cheney.



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