

Democratic leaders step up witchhunt against Congresswoman Omar on phony anti-Semitism charges

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The Democratic leadership of the House of Representatives plans to push through a resolution implicitly branding Rep. Ilhan Omar as an anti-Semite and linking her to historic crimes such as the Dreyfus frameup, the lynching of Leo Frank, the anti-Semitic ravings of Henry Ford, the mass internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II and last October's attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue by a fascist gunman who killed 11 worshippers.

This reactionary and dishonest exercise in political intimidation and character assassination is part of an escalating drive in the US and internationally to criminalize all criticism of the Israeli state's oppression of Palestinians by equating such criticism with anti-Semitism.

US President Donald Trump, who defended neo-Nazis in 2017 after one of them killed a left-wing counter-protestor, and who maintains ties with anti-Semitic groups, expressed his support for the witch-hunt against Omar Tuesday. "Representative Ilhan Omar is again under fire for her terrible comments concerning Israel. Jewish groups have just sent a petition to Speaker Pelosi asking her to remove Omar from Foreign Relations Committee. A dark day for Israel!"

Last Friday, an exhibitor at a Republican Party event in Charleston, West Virginia—"WVGOP Day at the Capitol"—displayed a poster linking Omar with the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington DC. The event, sponsored by the West Virginia Republican Party, invites the public to meet with party officials in the state capitol's upper rotunda.

The poster featured a picture of the World Trade Center's twin towers engulfed in flames below the words: "Never forget—you said." Beneath that image was a picture of Omar, with the words: "I am proof—you have forgotten."

A central aim of this campaign is to fabricate a supposed growth of "left-wing anti-Semitism," in large part to divert attention from the actual cultivation of far-right and neo-fascist forces, many of which are openly anti-Semitic, by capitalist governments from the Trump White House in the

US to Macron in France, the grand coalition government in Germany and the far-right Netanyahu government in Israel itself. In Britain, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and others who have in the past criticized the policies of the Israeli government have been the target of such an attack for months.

This campaign actually provides fuel for the very real and dangerous growth of anti-Semitism. To the extent that the Jewish people are identified with the crimes of the Israeli state and criticism of Israel is equated with anti-Semitism, ordinary Jews are made more vulnerable to fascistic efforts to whip up anti-Jewish sentiment.

While the proposed resolution does not single out Omar by name, it makes clear that she is its immediate target by beginning, "Whereas accusations of dual loyalty generally have an insidious, bigoted history..." This is a reference to trumped-up charges that the Minnesota congresswoman was echoing attacks on Jews as disloyal aliens when she complained at a recent town hall event of demands that she be thrown off of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and otherwise punished because she is critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

She said at that event: "I want to talk about the political influence in this country that says it is okay for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country." This followed a tweet in which she was more explicit, declaring, "I should not be expected to have allegiance/pledge support to a foreign country in order to serve my country in Congress or serve on committee." She made no mention of Jews and was speaking about demands on her own allegiance, not that of Jewish people.

Omar is one of two freshmen congresswomen elected last November who are Muslims, the other being Rashida Tlaib of Detroit. They are the first two Muslim-American women in the House of Representatives, and both have come under attack, beginning from the Republican right and increasingly joined by their own party, for statements sympathetic to the

plight of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation and repression.

Representative Eliot Engel (Democrat from New York), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called Omar's statement "a vile anti-Semitic slur" and accused her of questioning "the loyalty of fellow American citizens."

Right-wing pro-Republican media outlets, including Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post*, have called for Omar to be removed from the Foreign Affairs Committee. They were joined recently by Vice President Mike Pence, who said such a move was the minimum action that should be taken against her.

Omar is a Somali-American, whose family fled the country, devastated by the US invasion at the beginning of the 1990s and by drone assassinations and bombings that continue to the present. They came to the US in 1995. As such, despite her overall defense of US imperialism, she has felt obliged to speak out against such atrocities as the mass murder last year by the Israeli military of unarmed Palestinians protesting at the border fence between Israel and Gaza.

She has been targeted in particular by the Israel lobby, led by the most powerful pro-Israel organization, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), because she has supported the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which advocates cutting off academic and business ties with the state of Israel to force a change in Israeli policy towards the Palestinians.

Three weeks ago, she came under ferocious attack from both parties when she criticized the far-reaching influence of the Israel lobby over Congress. In a Twitter exchange with Glenn Greenwald of the *Intercept* about attacks on her from the top Republican in the House, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, she said the support of Washington politicians for Israeli repression of the Palestinians was "all about the Benjamins, baby," using a slang term for \$100 bills. When a pro-Israel journalist asked her what she meant, Omar responded with a single word: "AIPAC."

That Monday morning, February 11, the House Democratic Party leadership, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and four other top House Democrats, issued a joint statement denouncing Omar by name for using "anti-Semitic tropes" and making "prejudicial accusations about Israel's supporters."

Republican congressional leaders demanded a formal censure of both Omar and Tlaib, and several Democratic representatives circulated a letter linking the statements of Omar and Tlaib and any other statements critical of Israel to anti-Semitic atrocities such as the massacre at the Tree of

Life Synagogue. That document appears to have been used as the basis for the Democratic resolution expected to pass today.

The same afternoon as last month's Democratic leadership statement, Omar issued an apology. That, however, only set the stage for a further escalation of the witch-hunt against her and other critics of Israel.

Omar is being attacked, in part, for pointing to the very real influence, including financial, of the Israel lobby on Congress and the US political system as a whole. AIPAC, which supports the Israeli right and the Netanyahu government, will hold its annual policy conference this month, a three-day event in Washington DC that is expected to draw 18,000 people. Netanyahu is scheduled to speak and the event will be addressed, as all major AIPAC events are, by leaders of both US big business parties. US presidents and presidential candidates regularly make the pilgrimage to AIPAC conferences.

In an article on Tuesday mildly critical of AIPAC and the Israel lobby, the *New York Times*, which is hostile toward Omar and Tlaib, noted: "Traveling to Israel on a trip financed by AIPAC's education arm is practically a rite of passage for freshmen members of Congress." The *Times* also pointed out that the Senate last month passed an AIPAC-backed bill aimed at "crippling the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement."

As for the financial clout of AIPAC and the Israel lobby, while AIPAC itself does not directly donate to candidates, its members do, and the organization engages in extensive and expensive lobbying of politicians of both parties. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, the Israel lobby gave more than \$14.8 million in the 2018 midterm elections, 63 percent of which went to Democrats.

Pro-Israel groups spent \$3.5 million on lobbying in 2018, the vast majority of which came from AIPAC. In all, 269 members of the House and 57 members of the Senate received monetary contributions from pro-Israel interests in 2018. Of the five top congressional recipients, three—Senators Robert Menendez of New Jersey and Sherrod Brown of Ohio, and unsuccessful congressional candidate Dan Kohl of Wisconsin—were Democrats



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