

Right-wing campaign targets student critics of Chelsea Clinton

Josh Varlin**18 March 2019**

Two New York University students who confronted Chelsea Clinton have been the subject of a right-wing campaign, involving death threats, the dissemination of personal information and the trawling through of social media feeds for embarrassing information.

The campaign, promoted by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio—a potential Democratic Party presidential primary candidate—and Donald Trump, Jr., among others, is a disgusting attack on two students for criticizing a multimillionaire political figure.

The two students, Leen Dweik and Rose Asaf, confronted Clinton at a vigil at NYU for victims of the fascist massacre of Muslim worshipers and others in Christchurch, New Zealand, earlier that day. At the time of the vigil, 49 had been murdered. As of this writing, another person has died of their injuries and dozens are injured and in Christchurch Hospital.

“This [vigil], right here, is a result of a massacre stoked by people like you and the words that you put out into the world,” said Dweik. “And I want you to know that and I want you to feel that deep down inside. Forty-nine people died because of the rhetoric you put out there.”

Clinton replied with platitudes like, “I do believe words matter.” She left the premises shortly after a brief and heated back-and-forth.

Dweik was referring to Clinton’s tweets accusing Representative Ilhan Omar, a Minnesota Democrat, of anti-Semitism because Omar called attention to the undeniable influence of the Zionist lobby in Congress. Clinton had tweeted, in response to a comment slandering Omar: “Co-signed as an American. We should expect all elected officials, regardless of party, and all public figures to not traffic in anti-Semitism.”

An early sign-on to the anti-Omar campaign, Clinton was followed by other political figures, including the

congressional Democratic leadership. Omar and Michigan Democrat Rashida Tlaib are the first two Muslim women elected to Congress. The campaign against Omar and bogus allegations of “left-wing anti-Semitism” have served to tar any opposition to Zionism as anti-Semitic and distract from the real rise of anti-Semitism, which is the province of the far right. It has also legitimized the virulent Islamophobia expressed in the Christchurch massacre.

When explaining their actions, Asaf told the *Washington Post* that Clinton beginning her anti-Omar tweet with “as an American” seemed to be an “anti-immigrant trope” and “a dog whistle, … signaling this is a patriotic issue and that nationalism excludes people like Ilhan Omar.”

Dweik told the *Washington Post*, “I wanted to convey my grief.”

Dweik, who is a Muslim Palestinian, and Asaf, who is a Jewish Israeli-American, are both student senators and prominent activists at NYU in support of the rights of Palestinians and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign. They explain in a *BuzzFeed* article: “We thought it was inappropriate for her to show up to a vigil for a community she had so recently stoked hatred against. We were not alone in feeling uncomfortable—many students were dismayed to see her there.”

Without endorsing Dweik’s and Asaf’s politics (Asaf is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and campaigned for Bernie Sanders in 2016), they are absolutely correct in opposing the despicable role of Clinton in the campaign against Omar and linking it with the rise of Islamophobia.

The incident has since been seized upon by the right wing and ostensible liberals alike, with the lineup against the two students nearly universal. Trump, Jr.,

like Clinton also a multi-millionaire offspring of a president, chimed in with an extraordinarily hypocritical tweet, intoning: “It’s sickening to see people blame @ChelseaClinton for the NZ attacks because she spoke out against anti-Semitism. We should all be condemning anti-Semitism & all forms of hate.”

This from the son of a president who declared that there were “very fine people” among the fascist rioters in Charlottesville, Virginia. Trump, Jr., has perhaps been even more open than his father about sharing far-right filth on social media.

De Blasio tweeted that Clinton displayed “dignity and compassion … in the face of irresponsible accusations that she somehow ‘stoked’ the tragedy in New Zealand.”

Joining this reactionary pile-on are figures as disparate as pro-Democratic Twitter commentator Brian Krassenstein, ex-Bush White House press secretary Ari Fleischer and comedian Kathy Griffin.

The incident has also been reported by national and international media, including Fox News, RT, USA Today, the Daily Mail, Haaretz, Business Insider, the New Zealand Herald and, of course, the fascistic Breitbart. To the extent that the media coverage evinces an editorial preference, it is almost universally for Clinton rather than the two students.

The media circus around the incident has also served, to a considerable extent, to supplant coverage of the fascist massacre itself and its political origins.

Dweik and Asaf report receiving death threats, threats of sexual violence and racist abuse. Clinton, of course, will be fine. She is the only child of ex-President Bill Clinton and ex-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Chelsea Clinton is also a co-founder and co-chair of the Of Many Institute for Multifaith Leadership at NYU (in which capacity she was invited to the vigil).

Her husband is Marc Mezvinsky, a former senior partner at 3G Capital whose parents are both former congressional representatives and friends of the Clintons (his father pleaded guilty to 31 fraud charges in 2001). The direct cost of their wedding was as much as \$3 million.

Her public statements have been alternately vapid and reactionary, stretching back to her heckling of participants at an anti-war meeting in 2001 when she was a student at Oxford University.

And she has been well rewarded for her parentage and efforts. She earned \$600,000 annually as a special correspondent for NBC from 2011 to 2014, and she now has a seat on the board of Expedia, with compensation totaling just under \$300,000 a year. All told, her estimated net worth is \$15 million, and she and her husband sold a \$6 million apartment when moving into their current residence.

The fact that this nonentity has been fantastically rewarded and defended from the criticism of two university students is an indictment of the present cultural and political environment in the United States.

The fascist massacre in Christchurch raises burning questions, many of which can be summed up by asking, “Why is fascism back?” The campaign against Asaf and Dweik obscures these life-and-death issues and protects the very social class that bears responsibility for the resurgence of far-right, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic forces internationally.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at NYU will address these questions at a significant event in April featuring Christoph Vandreier, author of *Why Are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Germany*. We urge everyone seeking to oppose the genuine rise of fascist and anti-Semitic tendencies to attend our meeting, “The Threat of Fascism and How to Fight It,” on Thursday, April 18, at 6:30 p.m., in Lecture Hall 95 of the Global Center at NYU.

For more information on the IYSSE at New York University, visit our Facebook page or contact us at iysse@socialequality.com .

Organizing this meeting series entails substantial costs. The IYSSE is not funded by the banks and corporations or wealthy non-governmental organizations. If you believe this meeting series is important, donate as much as you can to pay for international travel, printing, promotion and other costs.



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