

Students for Justice in Palestine at New York University smeared as anti-Semitic

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A student organization at New York University that opposes Israeli policy toward the Palestinian people has become the subject of a coordinated attack by pro-Zionist organizations, the university's own administration and the national media.

In late April, New York University (NYU) student and former president of the Zionist club Realize Israel, Adela Cojab, filed a civil rights complaint with the Department of Education (DOE) denouncing the university for promoting "extreme antisemitism" by awarding the President's Service Award to the pro-Palestinian activist group Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) in April.

The accusation dovetails with an international right-wing campaign to slander left-wing individuals and organizations who oppose the policies of the Israeli state toward Palestinians as anti-Semitic and blaming those that criticize the Zionist project for the rise in anti-Semitic attacks.

The stated purpose of the NYU President's Service Award is the recognition of students and "student organizations for their commitment to civic engagement and service in local communities." SJP was one of 150 students and student organizations to receive the award this semester.

After the decision was denounced by Zionist clubs on campus, NYU President Andrew Hamilton failed to attend the award ceremony, citing his busy schedule. Subsequently, he came out in opposition to the club receiving the award.

Cojab filed the complaint against NYU with the DOE's Office of Civil Rights claiming that the university was in violation of Title VI for discrimination based on "colors, and national origins." Her letter states that "giving a humanitarian award to SJP is equivalent to giving such an award to the Ku Klux Klan, or any other racist organization," and also refers to the SJP as a "terror-affiliated anti-Semitic network."

Neal Sher, a former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the largest pro-Israel lobbying group in Washington, is representing Cojab. He has stated publicly that the purpose of the lawsuit is to "shake things up" at NYU and that it could result in the university losing federal funding or being hit with "all kinds of sanctions."

The accusations against SJP flip reality on its head: the pro-Palestinian group has regularly been the target of far-right

Zionist provocations, and in the 2016–2017 academic year, the NYU chapter received multiple anonymous death threats.

Cojab's complaint draws on an incident last year when two SJP members were arrested after disturbing a dance party hosted by Realize Israel in Washington Square Park, across the street from NYU's lower Manhattan campus. The complaint also references other events and peaceful protests held by SJP and claims several times that SJP has ties to various terrorist organizations.

Prior to the filing of the letter of complaint with the DOE, similar denunciations of the decision to give the award to SJP appeared in the national press. On April 22, Susan Shapiro—an author and graduate of NYU, who currently teaches classes at the university—wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* and demanded that NYU "rescind an honor given for discrimination, bigotry and bias, and condemn all injustice, not just the kind that's politically correct this week."

Shapiro in her piece manages, in a single paragraph, to defame as anti-Semitic all those that criticize Israel and amalgamate these views with those of openly neo-Nazi elements. She writes, "The NYU Jewish Center received threats; swastikas were found in a residence hall. The student government passed an anti-Israel BDS—boycott, divestment and sanctions—resolution. NYU activists confronted a pregnant Chelsea Clinton and insanely blamed her for the massacre at a New Zealand mosque because she criticized Rep. Ilhan Omar's anti-Semitic slurs."

Hamilton responded to Shapiro in another op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, stating, "Had it been up to me, SJP would not have received the award" because the club's "behavior has been divisive."

The politics of the BDS movement are of a limited protest character, seeking to channel disgust with Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people into a campaign to convince the imperialist powers to pressure Tel Aviv into changing its policies. It has nonetheless provoked a frenzied reaction from the Israeli government and its Zionist supporters, who concoct the lie that such politics are by definition anti-Semitic.

The attacks on SJP are part of an international campaign to intimidate anyone who condemns Israel's ceaseless violence against Palestinians as anti-Semitic and responsible for the rise

in violence against Jews.

This is particularly the case in the continued attack against Minnesota Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar for calling attention to the influence of the Zionist lobby within Congress. Following her remarks, the entire political establishment, including the Democratic Party, denounced her, and in March put a bill to a vote that essentially targeted Omar without calling her out by name. Republicans in Congress are now proceeding to target Representative Rashida Tlaib, a Michigan Democrat, by willfully twisting her words in order to portray them as “heinous anti-Semitic comments.”

On March 16, at NYU’s vigil for the victims of the fascist attack on a mosque in New Zealand, two NYU students—including SJP club president Leen Dweik—confronted Chelsea Clinton for her attacks on Ilhan Omar. Following this confrontation, both students were publicly denounced by Donald Trump Jr. and New York Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio, as well as other political figures. The students were also maligned in a variety of national and international publications.

While the NYU administration is undoubtedly concerned that the complaint to the DOE could impact the university’s funding—both in terms of federal funding and donations from wealthy individuals—it also provides a justification for the university to suppress political discussion, particularly left-wing and socialist views, on campus.

Since the complaint was filed, Hamilton and William Berkley, chair of NYU’s Board of Trustees, have denounced the recently passed resolution by faculty in NYU’s Department of Social and Cultural Analysis (SCA) to end cooperation with the NYU Tel Aviv, the university’s study abroad location in Israel. Hamilton and Berkley have referred to the resolution as “deplorable” and claim it could endanger academic freedom.

The SCA’s resolution specifically cites Israel’s policies that make it difficult for individuals of Palestinian descent to travel to Israel to participate in the program, as well as recently passed laws that prohibit critics of Israel from entering the country. The SCA faculty’s resolution is not binding.

The response of the administration takes place within a broader political context, where any defense of Palestinian rights is falsely equated with anti-Semitism and used to attack left-wing views. As an institution with close ties to Wall Street, the military and Washington’s political establishment, these attacks find acute form at NYU. This is clearly the case with the ability for two Zionist clubs to host Bret Stephens, a right-wing Zionist and columnist for the *New York Times*, who has said that Palestinians have a “blood fetish.”

During his talk, Stephens equated opposition to Israel with the growth in anti-Semitism and the fostering of far-right forces under the Trump administration. He claimed that Donald Trump “has legitimized a set of ideas that bring the extremists that much closer to the mainstream. In the same way that progressives on the left, by legitimizing anti-Zionism, have brought anti-Semitism closer to the fold so there’s a kind of

mirror-like process.”

It should be recalled that in 2017 Trump claimed that there were “very fine people” among the fascist rioters in Charlottesville, Virginia, who marched through the streets chanting “Jews will not replace us.” He has since reaffirmed this claim last month stating that he had responded “perfectly” to the question on Charlottesville.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents have been on the rise since 2013, with the largest number ever recorded in 2017, the first year of the Trump administration. In that year there were 1,986 recorded incidents, a 57 percent increase over 2016.

Stephens’s statements at NYU echo the attacks on British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn as anti-Semitic as well as the disgusting claims by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, as he visited far-right Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, that the Nazis were a leftist movement.

The duplicitous campaign by Zionist organizations, university administrations, the media and bourgeois politicians to label left-wing opposition to Israel as anti-Semitism has contributed to the growth of a reactionary and dangerous climate within academia. While the SJP is denounced and threatened for its protest activities, the right-wing extremist Jörg Baberowski—a German professor at Humboldt University, who has claimed “Hitler was not vicious”—can receive \$300,000 in funding from Princeton University without any backlash, least of all from Zionist and pro-Israel professors at that and other institutions.

The latest slanders against SJP are part of a broad and coordinated attempt to suppress the emerging anti-war movement of students and workers both in the US and internationally.



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