

Iowa college professor resigns under pressure after publicly supporting Antifa

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English professor Jeff Klinzman was forced to resign from his position at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa last Friday under pressure from the college administration. He was placed on leave following comments he made in support of Antifa. The college is reportedly replacing Klinzman, who has taught there since 2010.

Kirkwood has also reportedly stepped up campus security, ensuring it will be a visible presence “on Monday morning and going forward.”

At the center of the recent controversy is a Facebook comment on the Iowa Antifa Facebook page. Klinzman wrote “Yeah, I know who I'd clock with a bat...,” in response to a tweet from President Donald Trump who called Antifa “gutless Radical Left Wack Jobs who go around hitting (only non-fighters) people over the heads with baseball bats.”

On Thursday, Iowa ABC-affiliate KCRG published an article entitled, “Kirkwood professor: ‘I affirm that I am antifa.’” The quote came from a statement Klinzman made to KCRG reporter Josh Scheinblum. Scheinblum later tweeted his report to Donald Trump, who has called for Antifa to be listed as a terrorist organization.

On Friday, the professor resigned after being removed from his teaching positions.

Kirkwood College president Lori Sundberg issued a statement on the decision to remove Klinzman that claimed that the substance of his views was not at issue: “It is Kirkwood leadership’s assessment that the attention this matter has garnered has the potential to create an environment that is disruptive to our mission. Our decision to remove Mr. Klinzman from the classroom has nothing to do with the substance of his views or his right to express them.”

Sundberg hypocritically affirmed Klinzman’s

constitutional right to free speech while justifying the college’s removal of the professor based on the “perception” that public safety is at risk due to his views.

“This action does not in any way prevent him from continuing to engage in the expression of free speech. However, when the expression of views by him or any member of our community is perceived as placing public safety in jeopardy, or hampers our ability to deliver on our mission, we will always do what is necessary in service to our students’ pursuit of a higher education... In a free society and especially in higher education, a lively, robust and free exchange of ideas is essential, after all.”

By what standard is the college declaring that the views expressed by Klinzman are “perceived as placing public safety in jeopardy”? Perceived by whom? On what grounds? The rationale is in fact a justification for blatant attacks on free speech and the ability to remove from teaching positions anyone who expresses social and political opposition.

As the persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange demonstrates, the attack on free speech centrally involves the attempt by the ruling elites internationally to suppress opposition to social inequality, poverty and war.

KCRG also performed “a search through Klinzman’s Facebook page,” reporting that he wanted to “stop evangelical Christians.” Klinzman said to the news outlet, “It’s not pretty, and I’m not proud, but seeing what evangelical Christians are doing to this country and its people fills me with rage, and a desire to exact revenge.”

Klinzman’s comments were not illegal. Secret Service officials acknowledged that they were not being investigated as threatening. Indeed, if they were,

a significant portion of Facebook users would be under investigation for stating their hatred and anger at the Trump administration's policies.

KCRG interviewed a security professional Jason Blazakis who, in answering Scheinblum's questions about Antifa, emphasized the threats posed by far-right and white supremacist organizations: "I would just say if I'm an individual living in Iowa, I'd be more concerned, and I think the statistics bear this out, of being an individual that suffers because of a mass shooting carried out by an individual that may have right-leaning sympathies."

Klinzman has also expressed concern for his safety on Facebook, noting that photos of his house have been posted on right-wing news sites, including Fox News and KCRG.

The threat of violence comes not from the left, but from the far-right, with the support of significant sections of the ruling class. From the months prior to his election in 2016 and since, Trump has worked to cultivate the far-right, surrounding himself with fascist figures such as Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller and Sebastian Gorka.

However, it is not figures on the far-right who are targeted for removal from colleges and universities, but those who oppose them.



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