

No to right-wing “anti-Semitism” lawsuit against New York University!

The IYSSE at New York University
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at New York University (NYU) condemns the lawsuit filed against the university on the fraudulent basis of opposing anti-Semitism. The lawsuit is part of the state-led effort to equate criticism of the Israeli government and capitalism with violence against Jews. It has nothing to do with the fight against anti-Semitism, which will only be encouraged by this right-wing campaign. The IYSSE calls on students to oppose the lawsuit and defend the right to free speech.

Last April, NYU student Adela Cojab, who has since graduated, filed a legal complaint with the Department of Education (DoE) in response to the university’s decision to award the President’s Service Award to the pro-Palestinian university club Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). SJP was one of 150 students and organizations given the award for the Spring semester of 2019. In a *Wall Street Journal* Op-Ed, NYU President Andrew Hamilton stated, “Had it been up to me, SJP would not have received the award.” Hamilton did not attend the awards ceremony.

The complaint argued that the university failed to protect its Jewish students, citing “attacks on social media to resolutions of student government, to boycott [Israel], flag burning and physical assault.” As evidence, the complaint cited an incident last year when two SJP members were arrested while protesting at an event hosted by a Zionist club at NYU in Washington Square Park, located near NYU’s lower Manhattan campus.

Cojab based her complaint on the false equation of criticism of Zionism and the actions of the Israeli government with violent anti-Semitic attacks from right-wing forces, such as last December’s shooting at a Jewish-owned market in New Jersey in which six people were killed, or the 2018 massacre of 11 Jews by a neo-Nazi at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh.

The initial complaint slandered the SJP as a “terror-affiliated anti-Semitic network,” and claimed that “giving a humanitarian award to SJP is equivalent to giving such an award to the Ku Klux Klan, or any other racist

organization.” As the WSWS wrote at the time, “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.”

Following Cojab’s complaint, the DoE launched an investigation into NYU. John Beckman, an NYU spokesperson, responded by expressing his solidarity with the same Zionist elements who had initiated the lawsuit. He protested the university’s innocence of the charge by stressing that NYU’s “president rejected and criticized attempts to ostracize pro-Israel groups; that the University has publicly, repeatedly, and vigorously repudiated BDS [boycott, divestment and sanctions] proposals both at NYU and elsewhere.” He added that NYU is the only American university to operate a campus in Israel.

The response of NYU as well as other universities to these legal complaints was sharply criticized by the Middle East Studies Association’s Committee of Academic Freedom (MESA). In a letter addressed to the NYU president, the MESA stated that the university’s failure to explicitly reject the conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism “not only threatens the constitutionally protected right to free speech but may also ... [undermine] academic freedom.”

The NYU lawsuit is being used as a precedent to crack down on supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) and other left-wing critics of Israel, especially on college campuses. Israeli advocacy groups have already filed similar complaints in California at UC Irvine, UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley, and also at Barnard College, Brooklyn College and Columbia University in New York City and at Duke University in North Carolina. In early 2020, two separate complaints were brought at UCLA.

The lawsuit against NYU is a product of a close alliance between the most right-wing Zionists and the Trump administration, but the Democrats are almost unanimously complicit. In December, the US President signed an

executive order that reinterprets Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits funding to institutions which discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national origin, to include anti-Semitism. Trump has repeatedly spelled out the policy of equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. He declared that if publicly-funded universities “want to accept the tremendous amount of federal dollars you get every year you must reject anti-Semitism.” His executive order based itself on the fraudulent 2016 definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. This labeled as anti-Semitic all those who “[claim] that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”

A few days after signing the executive order last December, Trump introduced Cojab to an audience of more than 4,000 at the Israeli-American Council (IAC) National Summit in Miami, Florida. Cojab has since given interviews on the NYU lawsuit to numerous outlets, including the *Jerusalem Post*, a right-wing Israeli daily.

The IYSSE has principled political differences with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS). In holding the Israeli population as a whole responsible for the criminal actions of the Israeli state against the Palestinians, and in appealing to US corporations and US imperialism to take action against their Zionist ally, it confuses workers internationally and reinforces national divisions and antagonisms between Palestinians and Jewish citizens of Israel. The fight to defend the rights of the Palestinian people can only be based on a united socialist struggle by the Jewish and Arab masses against imperialism and for the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

However, the right-wing campaign against the BDS movement and the lawsuit at NYU, have absolutely nothing to do with the fight against anti-Semitism, and must be unequivocally opposed as an assault on democratic rights.

They are part of a state-led effort to slander and criminalize all left-wing criticism of the state of Israel, and more broadly of capitalism and imperialism, as anti-Semitic. It is no coincidence that this campaign is led by the very same forces that have built up and encouraged far-right and fascist forces in recent years. While supporting the vicious policies of the Israeli government, US President Trump has not let a day go by without whipping up xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism. This has created the climate in which several fascists and right-wing extremists have felt encouraged to perpetrate horrific terrorist attacks, including the Pittsburgh massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in October 2018.

Internationally, the smear of anti-Semitism has been leveled against a number of bourgeois politicians perceived as critics of the Israeli government, including UK Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and Democratic Party

Representative Rashida Tlaib. The German government has engaged in a similar effort to equate all criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. At the same time, it has continued to defend right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski of Berlin’s Humboldt University, who claims that “Hitler wasn’t vicious” and “did not want to know about Auschwitz.” This defense continued even after Baberowski physically assaulted a left-wing student. In 2019, this same Baberowski received a \$300,000 grant from Princeton University to study “Dictatorships in Transition.”

The Trump-backed “anti-Semitism” campaign is the opposite of a genuine struggle against the scourge of anti-Semitism. The socialist movement has always been in the forefront of this struggle, while Zionism has a sordid history of collaborating with and encouraging anti-Semitic forces. The Netanyahu government itself has embraced as “great friends of Israel” fascistic leaders ranging from Trump to Brazil’s Bolsonaro, Italy’s Salvini, Hungary’s Orban and Duterte of the Philippines.

The promotion of the far right by the state and the attempt to slander and criminalize all opposition to capitalism and the state of Israel as “anti-Semitic” are two sides of the same coin. Amid a historic crisis of the capitalist system, now massively exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, the bourgeoisie is attacking core democratic rights and moving toward dictatorial forms of rule. This includes smearing those opposed to the crimes of imperialism and the Israeli state as “anti-Semites” who are to be denied the right of free speech.

The IYSSE at NYU therefore denounces this reactionary lawsuit as an assault on the rights of all workers and students. We call upon all those who are concerned with the defense of democratic rights and the fight against the threat of fascism and war to join our club at NYU, and take up the fight for socialism within the working class.



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