

Attack on Bristol University Professor David Miller spearheads national anti-Semitism witch-hunt

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For months, there have been vicious attacks on Professor David Miller by MPs and pro-Zionist lobby groups for criticising Israeli policy towards the Palestinians, with calls for him to be dismissed from his post at the University of Bristol. It is the centre-piece of a bogus anti-Semitism witch-hunt on university campuses throughout Britain that threatens to clampdown on freedom of expression and academic research.

The Union of Jewish Students (UJS), dedicated to fostering an “enduring commitment” to Israel among Jewish students and the recipient of funding from Israel, along with Conservative and Labour Friends of Israel MPs have demanded the university investigate Miller. The *Jewish Chronicle* thundered that he had no place on any campus, saying, “When academics move from research and inquiry, however controversial, to what amounts to intimidation, attacking one group of students, a line is crossed.”

They claimed, in a deliberate distortion, that in one of his lectures he had criticised Israel for wanting to “impose its will over the world” and had said some Jewish students were being used as “political pawns by a violent, racist foreign regime,” whereas he had warned of the potential harm caused by UJS in its highly partisan campaigning for Israel and Zionism. They were particularly incensed because Miller had shown the links between various Zionist organisations in Britain, such as the Community Security Trust, Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM) and UJS to the State of Israel.

A cabal of pro-Israel activists, including Lord Ian Austin, the virulently anti-Palestinian Labour peer, opponent of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and now the government’s trade envoy to Israel, along with the British of Deputies of British Jews and the *Jewish Chronicle*, have called for Miller to be fired. Following complaints from some Jewish students, Avon and Somerset Police are carrying out an investigation into “a hate crime or hate incident taking place during lectures at the University of

Bristol” to see whether any offence was committed.

Conservative MPs have attacked the university, calling it a “hotbed of antisemitism” and accusing it of fostering a climate similar to that of “1930s Nazi Germany,” citing reports from Jewish students that they felt “unsafe and unprotected” on campus. Several MPs have called on Michelle Donelan, the universities minister, to explain why she had not spoken directly to the university or threatened sanctions such as withdrawing funding.

In the House of Lords, Lord Parkinson, responding to a question about the government’s attitude towards Professor Miller’s lecture and what is being done “to ensure the safety of [Jewish] students,” said that although universities are independent, “We consider that the University of Bristol could do more to make its condemnation of Professor Miller’s conduct clear.” He added, “Students also can and should contact the police if they believe the law has been broken. Professor Miller has expressed some ill-founded and reprehensible views and the government wholeheartedly rejects them.”

In March, after receiving a letter signed by 100 MPs accusing the professor, without citing any evidence, of “inciting hatred against Jewish students” and “anti-Semitic conspiracy fantasy,” the university succumbed to pressure and announced that it had launched an investigation, although it did not state when or why.

Miller, a professor of Political Sociology at the University of Bristol, has for years focused his research on propaganda, lobbying and “spin.” He founded and directed the non-profit company Public Interest Investigations that runs Spinwatch and Powerbase, has written several books on propaganda, spin and lobbying and carried out studies on the Israel lobby’s activities, including co-authoring *Bad News for Labour: Antisemitism, the Party and Public Belief*.

His research made him the target of a rotten smear campaign by the Labour Party, falsely alleging anti-Semitism, and earned him the enmity of the pro-Israel lobby

and parliamentary war hawks of both parties, as well as the Israeli government. Act.IL, a troll army directed and funded by Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs to counter pro-Palestinian activists, called on users of its app—many of them paid employees or students in receipt of a stipend—to attack an *Al Jazeera* opinion piece by former National Union of Students president, Malia Bouattia defending Miller.

Last May, after the Labour Party suspended his membership, Miller resigned. The Labour Party has justified a mass purge of its left-wing members—including Corbyn and his supporters—on concocted charges of anti-Semitism based on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. The IHRA equates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, most notoriously in a list of 11 “examples” including describing the establishment of Israel as a “racist endeavour.”

Israel's “nation-state” law makes explicit what has long been implicit: that Israel is a nation-state for the Jews alone, with the declaration, “The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.”

Miller noted that Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer had received a £50,000 donation from pro-Israel lobbyist Trevor Chinn—information which was not disclosed until after polls had closed in the party leadership election. Miller described the “targeted harassment” of himself and other left-wing members as confirming “the degree of influence that Zionist advocates and lobbyists for Israel have over disciplinary processes and Party policy.”

These attacks on Miller have been opposed in an open letter by nearly 400 academics, including Noam Chomsky, Ahdaf Soueif, Norman Finkelstein, Judith Butler, Ilan Pappé, John Pilger and Deepa Kumar and his colleagues at the University of Bristol. They argued that there had been “unrelenting and concerted efforts to publicly vilify” Miller, who is an “eminent scholar” whose “research on the manipulation of narratives by lobby groups has been crucial to deepening public knowledge and discourse in this area.”

A general petition supporting him has garnered several thousand signatures. The Support David Miller campaign said, “We are appalled to learn that the University of Bristol has wilted to the demands of pro-Israel campaign groups by launching an unnecessary investigation into Professor Miller's well-evidenced comments.” It added, “Every academic and student in the country should be deeply concerned about this coordinated attack on academic freedom.”

Pro-Israel groups, including the UJS, are using the IHRA to deny a platform at universities to speakers critical of Israel and lobby governments to cut funds to any universities hosting an “Apartheid Israel Week” and to regulate content

on social media platforms.

These moves come as Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has announced plans—in the name of guaranteeing “free speech” at UK universities—to create the legal framework for state intervention on campuses, to protect right-wing reactionaries and silence protest. His proposals include placing a free speech condition on universities which want to access public funding, allowing the Office for Students (OfS) to fine institutions which breach the condition, appointing a “free speech champion” to investigate alleged breaches and recommend redress, and allowing academics, students or visiting speakers to sue for compensation under a new statutory tort where they claim to have had their free speech infringed.

The new arrangements will apply directly to student unions, which the government is looking at bringing under the remit of the OfS tasked with forcing universities to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

The IHRA definition not only provides a mechanism to attack free speech regarding opposition to Israel and the ethnic-nationalist ideology of Zionism and to cancel pro-Palestinian events, but also to more broadly censor, silence and criminalise left-wing views and organisations, while whipping up and legitimising anti-Muslim sentiment, and shifting political discourse sharply to the right in line with Washington and London's aggressive policies in the Middle East.

Far from seeking to oppose anti-Semitism, such efforts are aimed at dictating what can and cannot be said at universities and in academic research as well as prescribing the subject matter of research itself. These authoritarian moves are bound up with efforts to militarise the campuses and turn them into centres for government propaganda and adjuncts of Britain's war machine, necessarily directed against the widespread anti-war sentiment among students and youth.



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