

University of Bristol sacks Professor David Miller for criticising US militarism and Israel's oppression of the Palestinians

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The University of Bristol has sacked political sociology Professor David Miller with immediate effect, primarily on the basis of allegations that his criticisms of US militarism and Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people were "offensive."

This dangerous attack on freedom of speech and academic freedom follows a vicious, two-year-long campaign for his dismissal by pro-Zionist lobby groups and MPs.

The university admitted that a Queen's Counsel (QC) lawyer had found that the comments Miller allegedly made "did not constitute unlawful speech." It therefore sought to justify its decision by claiming that Miller's dismissal was prompted by its duty of care to students and the wider community, following a disciplinary hearing that concluded he "did not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from our staff."

Such sanctimonious statements express the wholesale erosion of democratic principles and mechanisms within academia and British capitalist society, including the protection of freedom of expression in higher education institutions in the 1986 Education Act.

The universities routinely ignore the "duty of care" to their students as they herd them back to the campuses and in-person learning even as cases of COVID-19 among young people continue to rise.

If the right to criticise the policies and actions of Israel or any other ally of Washington and London contravenes the "duty of care" to students and the wider community, what other views can be outlawed and suppressed? Opposition to policies restricting the spread of the coronavirus? Or to imperialist war? Criticism and questioning of the demonization of Muslims and migrants? Or the "war on terrorism" and "humanitarian intervention" pretexts used to justify predatory military intervention in the Middle East and elsewhere based on lies?

Professor Miller is well known for his research on Islamophobia, state and corporate lobbying, propaganda and

"spin." He founded and directed the non-profit company Public Interest Investigations that runs Spinwatch and Powerbase and has co-authored and edited books including *Bad News for Labour: Antisemitism, the Party and Public Belief*; *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*; *The Israel Lobby and the European Union*; and *The Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre. Giving Peace a Chance?*

Miller has received support from hundreds of academics at the University of Bristol and elsewhere and from students in the UK and internationally, as well as from Jews and Muslims. He has said he will challenge the decision through the university's procedures and, if unsuccessful, will take the case to an employment tribunal.

The sacking of such a senior academic is aimed at intimidating the political left and overturning basic democratic rights. It is one expression of the poisonous and repressive atmosphere whipped up to silence opposition to British preparations for potentially catastrophic US-led wars against China or other perceived threats to Washington's global hegemony. Miller's case follows similar tactics used against other academics: Joseph Massad, Steven Salaita, Cornel West, Marc Lamont Hill, Sami al-Arian and Norman Finkelstein in the US, as well as Tim Anderson in Australia and Farid Hafez in Austria.

Professor Miller's research earned him the hatred of the pro-Israel lobby, the most ardent militarists in both the Conservative and Labour Parties, and the Israeli government, which after Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party in 2015 whipped up a hysterical campaign accusing him and other left-wing members of anti-Semitism. A Blairite cabal, with links to Israeli lobby groups such as the Community Security Trust (CST) and the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM), justified the mass expulsion of Corbyn's supporters and then Corbyn himself using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism.

The IHRA definition equates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, most notoriously in its list of “examples” of anti-Semitism that include describing the establishment of Israel as a “racist endeavour.” Israel’s own “nation-state” law passed in 2018 defines Israel as a nation-state for the Jews alone, declaring, “The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) raised the alarm over the significance of this right-wing campaign, writing in 2016, “A political amalgam has been established that equates any criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, with the aim of charging the entire ‘left’ with this crime—on the basis that all Jews identify with the state of Israel. Any criticism of the historical actions of the Zionist movement, and, above all, any equation of Israel’s brutal treatment of Palestinians with that suffered by Jews under fascism, is outlawed.”

In subsequent articles, the WSWS warned that the “strident accusations of anti-Semitism are aimed at shifting the domestic and foreign policy not just of Labour, but of the entire British political establishment sharply to the right.”

This right-wing offensive had no historical legitimacy or popular support. It was the spearhead for a state-orchestrated conspiracy, led by the Blairites “acting with the Conservative Party, the media, the military and intelligence establishment and the Israel lobby.” This cabal sought to extend their campaign to local authorities and the universities with same methods. Last year, then Conservative Education Secretary Gavin Williamson wrote to the universities threatening to withhold funding if they failed to adopt the IHRA definition.

The campaign to force the university to sack Miller began in 2019 after he cited the Zionist movement as one of five sources of Islamophobia in a lecture on the subject and showed a diagram linking various Jewish organisations in Britain to Zionist lobbying. The Community Security Trust lobbied Bristol to censor him, while the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) pushed to have Miller fired. The university’s Jewish Students Society (JSoc) claimed that Miller’s identification of Israeli lobbying efforts was akin to the anti-Semitic trope that Jews wield a covert influence on political affairs. The university initially rejected their complaint on the basis that his lecture could not be considered as anti-Semitic because it did not contain any material that was hostile to Jews.

JSoc launched a campaign claiming they felt “unsafe and unprotected” on campus. The *Jewish Chronicle*, Jewish Board of Deputies and Rupert Murdoch’s *Times* newspaper also leapt into the fray, while 100 parliamentarians wrote to the university accusing the professor of “inciting hatred

against Jewish students” and “anti-Semitic conspiracy fantasy.” The Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) began a legal suit against the university, claiming it had both breached its duty of care to its students and was “liable in its own right, for unlawful conduct in breach of the Equality Act.”

In March, the university announced that it had launched the investigation that has now concocted a flimsy pretext for Miller’s sacking.

That the anti-Semitism witch-hunt of the left has reached such an advanced stage is devastating proof of how Corbyn’s political cowardice has demobilised the working class and young people and given the right-wing its head. The WSWS explained how Corbyn refused his popular mandate to drive the Blairites from the Labour Party and “instead used all his political authority among workers to preserve the control of the right-wing, opposing all popular moves to expel them while insisting on ‘party unity.’”

“It was this which enabled the Blairites to pursue their plans to remove the Corbynites, centred on the anti-Semitism witch-hunting of his leading allies, including former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone, black Jewish activist Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth, Chris Williamson MP, and countless rank-and-file members. They then retook control of the party following the electoral disaster of December 2019.”

The defence of fundamental democratic rights necessitates the independent mobilisation of the working class and young people, in opposition to social inequality and the drive to war. The demand must be raised for the reinstatement of Professor Miller and a halt to all attacks on academic and intellectual freedom.



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