

NYU graduate student loses job, investigated “for anti-Semitism” after writing anti-Israel slogan on trash bag

Jesse Thomas
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A New York University graduate student, Naye Idriss, has reportedly lost her university job after being accused of violating the university’s Non-Discrimination and Harassment and vandalism policies last summer by writing “f*ck Israel” and “Free Palestine” on a trash bag.

Idriss, who studies at NYU’s Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, worked at the university’s Elmer Holmes Bobst Library as an Arabic translator. On a white canvas mail bag in the trash that read “Israel Postal Co. Ltd,” she graffitied the words “f*ck” followed by “free Palestine.” In November, she underwent hearings by the university and the human resources department. In January, at the beginning of the spring semester, her annual job reapplication was denied. Additionally, two of Idriss’ colleagues, who defended her during her proceedings, were not offered to return to their positions. The story was subsequently reported by the *Washington Square News* (WSN), NYU’s student newspaper.

Idriss has denounced the investigations as a blatant attack on freedom of speech. “It goes to show how desperate they are when they choose to go after a student just for expressing political speech on a trash bag. It’s absurd to me,” Idriss told the *Washington Square News*.

Palestine Legal, an American nonprofit law firm that specializes in Palestinian rights cases on universities across the US, issued a press release in her defense.

The right-wing Zionist *Jerusalem Post* has published an attack on Idriss, and the right-wing watchdog StopAntisemitism.org tweeted an image of her with details about her place of birth from an account with 65,000 followers.

The university has not publicly commented on Idriss’s investigation other than acknowledging that “there was an incident that involved the writing of profanity in the library, and that various appropriate NYU offices have looked into the matter and responded to it.”

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at NYU condemns the anti-democratic action taken by the NYU administration against Idriss. This constitutes a fundamental assault on democratic rights and sets a dangerous precedent for the victimization and targeting of left-wing students and university employees.

For years, the false equation of opposition to the Israeli state with anti-Semitism has been the basis for an escalation of the assault on democratic rights and the criminalization and suppression of left-wing opposition to capitalism and the war policies of imperialism. The far right, which in many cases has helped spearhead this reactionary campaign, has only emerged strengthened from it.

NYU has long played an important role in this state-backed campaign. The university maintains extensive ties to the US military and state apparatus and is run by a board of trustees whose members are composed predominantly of Wall Street hedge fund managers, and figures from the Democratic and the Republican parties.

In the spring of 2020, a former NYU graduate student, Adela Cojab, filed a lawsuit against the university for awarding the President’s Service Award to a pro-Palestinian campus club. The case attempted to equate the award ceremony with the university’s failure to protect Jewish students from violence and

specifically targeted the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. University President Andrew Hamilton effectively backed her lawsuit in an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal*.

Cojab's lawsuit was a part of the effort by the Trump administration and the pro-Israel lobby to implement and enforce a policy of equating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. In December of 2019, Trump signed an executive order which imbued Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act with language explicitly condemning anti-Semitism. The order was based on the 2016 definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as any criticism of the State of Israel on the basis that it is a "racist endeavor." Cojab was subsequently invited by Trump to speak on the case at an Israeli-American Council national event.

In the fall of 2020, the NYU administration sided with videoconferencing corporation Zoom over its decision to shut down online meetings sponsored by San Francisco State University (SFSU) that featured pro-Palestinian activists. Online meetings at NYU and other universities across the country held in opposition to the canceling of the SFSU event were similarly shut down, sparking broad opposition.

The campaign against Idriss coincides with last week's vote by the Republican House majority to remove Rep. Ilhan Omar from the Foreign Affairs Committee. For years, Omar, who has the backing of the Democratic Socialists of America, a pseudo-left faction within the Democratic Party, has been publicly attacked as an "anti-Semite" both by figures from the Democratic Party establishment and far-right Republicans for her timid statements criticizing Israel.

The blatant assault on the democratic rights of Naye Idriss by the New York University administration can only be understood within their broader political context. Without even so much as a public discussion or declaration, the US and NATO have de facto entered a military conflict with Russia in Ukraine which threatens humanity with a nuclear catastrophe.

Last Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with French President Emmanuel Macron and pledged to send armaments to Ukraine and continue provocations and attacks against Iran, a central ally of Russia in the war in Ukraine. Netanyahu's government is the most right-wing in Israel's history

and is replete with far-right, fascist and Jewish supremacists. For the past weeks, it has been shaken by a wave of protests of over 100,000 people, including both Jewish and Arab citizens with reports describing Jewish protesters flying Palestinian flags side by side with Israeli Arabs.

NYU's targeting of Naye Idriss for her comments on a trash bag sets a dangerous precedent for the silencing of anyone who speaks out against these war policies on campus and beyond. It must be opposed as a matter of principle. The defense of democratic rights is an indispensable component of the fight against war.

The International and Youth and Students for Social Equality is fighting to build a global movement by young people against imperialist war that is rooted in the international working class and based on the struggle for socialism. Our club at NYU is organizing a meeting this Wednesday at 8:00 p.m., "The Socialist Response to the War in Ukraine & The Danger of World War III." We urge all students at NYU and throughout New York who are determined to fight against war and the attack on democratic rights to attend.



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