Israeli government promotes call by Columbia University professor to “eradicate” pro-Palestinian student organizations

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25 October 2023

In an indication of the type of far-right elements that are being whipped up to support the US-backed genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, on Friday, the Israeli government’s Twitter/X account retweeted a video of a fascistic rant by Columbia Business School Assistant Professor Shai Davidai, which called for the “eradication” of pro-Palestinian student organizations at US universities—which he slandered as “pro-terror”—including at Columbia, New York University (NYU), Harvard, University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley), Stanford and Northwestern.

Davidai presented his tirade at a pro-Israel vigil held on the Columbia University campus in support of Jewish victims of kidnappings in Gaza. The event was held in opposition to the massively popular demonstrations occurring in the past two weeks in solidarity with Palestinian people.

While the video of the vigil showed very low turnout, with roughly 30 individuals present, Davidai’s Twitter/X post garnered nearly 5 million views, with 21,000 reposts and 56,000 “likes.” Those who have supported the video, in addition to the Israeli government, have largely consisted of right-wing politicians and social media pundits, including Trump 2024 campaign supporters and 2020 election deniers, extreme nationalists of many shades, religious fanatics and outright fascists.

Denouncing pro-Palestinian organizations at Columbia as “pro-terror,” Davidai attacked university presidents for being “cowards” and supposedly not being “willing to take a stand.” Davidai then called on the president of Columbia, Minouche Shafik, to “eradicate” pro-Palestinian student organizations.

The Israeli Twitter/X account which retweeted Davidai’s video is managed by the Digital Diplomacy department of the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The ministry is a key part of the government and works closely with the Israel Defense Forces as they carry out military operations, including the genocidal assault on Gaza which began more than two weeks ago.

There is little question that Davidai’s repugant rant is being promoted with the support of the Israeli and American ruling classes. Their aim is to threaten and intimidate the widespread opposition to the genocide and escalating war crimes by Israel, which have already cost at least 6,500 lives, roughly half of them children.

In the context of growing protests internationally, the Israeli government and its US backers are fearful of the fact that the overwhelming majority of students and workers support Palestine. This is why they claim that US academic institutions are not targeting speech which undermines its policy efforts aggressively enough. This is despite the fact that university administrations have been complicit in an ongoing assault on the democratic rights of students and faculty who are voicing opposition to the unfolding genocide.

At Harvard University, a vicious campaign of slander and intimidation has taken place against students who have spoken out against Israel. Following the publishing of a pro-Palestinian statement signed by nearly three dozen students, a billboard truck displaying photographs of the statement’s signatories paraded around the campus.

Billionaire Bill Ackman, claiming to speak for a “number of CEOs,” called in a Tweet for the public release of the names of those who signed the Harvard statement, to ensure that none of these students would ever be “inadvertently hired” for employment at companies within the domain of these executives. An investigation by the *Guardian* later revealed that the trucks were funded by a network of far-right and fascistic American political organizations.

A student at UC Berkeley reported to the WSWS that students and faculty have been fearful of campus censorship, repression and retaliation for speaking out against Israel’s siege of Gaza. A journalism student at a community college in California told the WSWS that Muslim and Arab students at their school had reported that the “college administration had specifically asked them not to voice their opinions to protect themselves from being blacklisted.”

At NYU, Student Bar Association (SBA) President Ryna Workman was denounced by the university administration for a pro-Palestinian statement and their prospective employer

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rescinded a job offer. The SBA board then voted to initiate No Confidence proceedings to remove Ryna as SBA president, and eight SBA members resigned, citing online threats to their safety following these events. Workman has publicly referred to a barrage of online harassment, doxxing of personal information and death threats following this attack by the administration.

Last week, the NYU administration also backed a social media campaign that was launched against two NYU students who tore down posters displaying Israeli hostages on campus. The students were doxxed and a deluge of right-wing propaganda was unleashed against them. The response by NYU was to announce that they would consider taking "disciplinary action" against the students.

NYU students also have reported to WSWS reporters that Palestinian students and their supporters have had their information posted online by right-wing groups for as little reason as attending meetings of pro-Palestinian student organizations.

These attempts to intimidate opposition make the growing protests all the more significant. Significantly, Workman published a powerful statement again denouncing the genocide days after the attacks against them began. Ninety-four faculty members at NYU signed a statement supporting the formation of an NYU chapter of "Faculty for Justice in Palestine," in order "to oppose the war on Gaza, the continuing occupation and brutalization of the Palestinians subject to Israeli control, and the threats to our students and colleagues who want to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people."

Internationally, protests in opposition to Israeli war crimes have expanded despite similar efforts to slander and suppress them. On Saturday, the largest demonstration in London since those against the outbreak of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 drew roughly 300,000 attendees. Protests were also held at many US campuses, including NYU, Columbia and Harvard, in a reflection of the broader opposition within the working class and among students and youth to the crimes of the state of Israel and the role of US imperialism in the genocide.

On Saturday, roughly 10,000 protesters gathered in a predominantly Palestinian neighborhood of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. At NYU on Friday, a spontaneous demonstration broke out at NYU's Bobst Library in support of Palestinian students and other students who have been the victims of the campaign of harassment and intimidation by pro-Israeli elements on campus. Thousands of students across New York City and the US also participated in a national walk out on Wednesday.

Speaking in support of the popular opposition expressed by artists to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, a professor at Harvard University told the WSWS, "I've been grateful for the bravery of many artists making statements in opposition to the genocidal attacks against Palestinians. Scientists have also been making statements and some have come under attack as a result."

On October 13, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the United States published a statement titled "No to the criminalization of anti-war views on US campuses! For a mass movement by workers and youth against the onslaught on Gaza!" Explaining the motivation behind the attacks on the democratic rights of students and academics who voice opposition to the genocide, it said,

> The ruling class in the US and Europe, as in Israel, confronts growing domestic opposition and militancy within the working class and youth. In the US, the ruling class has been rattled by the emergence of the largest strike wave in decades, involving workers across the auto, healthcare, logistics and education industries.
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> Workers and students must be warned: The logic of the current campaign against anti-war views on university campuses means that the ruling class will set into motion its entire state apparatus, with the cooperation of the major corporations, universities and the media, to crack down on any expression of opposition to the war policies and propaganda of the ruling class. This campaign is meant to set a precedent to eliminate remaining democratic rights and intimidate and criminalize opposition by workers and youth to war and all other policies of the ruling class.
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> Workers and youth will not take these assaults lying down. Despite the concerted campaign to criminalize opposition to the war, mass demonstrations continue to break out in the US and worldwide. But these demonstrations need to be given a conscious political program and perspective upon which to fight.

On Thursday, October 26, the IYSSE in New York and at NYU are holding a public meeting at 7 p.m. at the Houston Street Center (273 Bowery) to oppose the genocide in Gaza. We urge all our readers to attend and share the meeting info as widely as possible. Contact the IYSSE to get involved today in the fight against war!

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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