

Enforcing Ontario government's witch-hunt, York University threatens pro-Palestinian student associations with de-registration

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The Canadian ruling elite's efforts to witch hunt and intimidate into silence any and all critics of Israel's brutal genocide against the population of Gaza is having a chilling impact on university campuses. At multiple institutions, including York University in Toronto, student associations and clubs have been threatened with de-registration for expressing support for the Palestinian people and condemning Israeli war crimes.

This campaign of vilification reached a new peak when Ontario Colleges and Universities Minister Jill Dunlop denounced by name students and academics from the floor of the provincial legislature as "anti-Semites" and "supporters of terror." Previously, she had demanded on behalf of the province's hard-right, Doug Ford-led Progressive Conservative government that York and other government-funded universities take action against student groups voicing support for the Palestinian people's right to challenge Israeli dispossession and repression.

It is within this climate that the administration at the province's second largest post-secondary institution, Toronto's York University, has felt emboldened to threaten several student representative bodies for their defence of the Palestinians. On October 12, the York Federation of Students, York University Graduate Student Association and the Glendon College Student Union issued a statement condemning Israel's illegal and bloody suppression of the Palestinian population. The statement declared that "Recently, in a strong act of resistance, the Palestinian people tore down and crossed the illegitimate border fence erected by the settler-colonial apartheid state of so-called Israel" and that "These resistance efforts are a direct response to the ongoing and violent occupation of Palestine."

For any honest observer of the treatment of the

Palestinians by Israel, these statements would not be controversial but an acknowledgment of fact. Gaza has been declared an "open-air prison" since 2007, where millions are terrorized by the Israeli military. These dire conditions are tolerated because Israel remains a critical outpost of American power in the Middle East. So long as the United States remains the global hegemon of world capitalism, then Israel can continue to act with impunity in terrorizing the Palestinian population.

However, the student groups' statement directly challenged the ruling-class narrative of Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, which the entire political establishment and corporate media have universally denounced as the "terrorism" and the act of "terrorists." York University administrators therefore responded swiftly with bureaucratic threats. On October 13, the university administration issued a statement threatening to remove recognition of the three York student unions unless they retracted their pro-Palestinian declaration.

Rather than address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the York administration arbitrarily framed the statement as being antisemitic. "We call upon the executives of the York Federation of Students, York University Graduate Student Association, and the Glendon College Student Union to immediately clarify that they firmly reject any acts of violence or discrimination against Jewish students or other members of the community, and to reaffirm their commitment to non-violence and the safety of all of their members," it asserted.

This attempt to frame a condemnation of Israel and support for the Palestinian people as antisemitic is a textbook example of right-wing efforts to delegitimize criticism of Zionism, an inherently anti-democratic and exclusivist ideology. Considering York University is invested in arms manufacturing and fossil fuels and sits

upon masses of real estate and student housing, its administration is behaving like any other capitalist business in rallying around the banner of imperialism and endorsing Israeli war crimes.

The university administration feels capable of proceeding with such aggression because it is part of a comprehensive onslaught on democratic rights organized by the entire ruling elite. Governments at all levels and corporate media outlets incessantly denounce criticism of Israeli war crimes as “anti-Semitic” and support for “terrorism.” The New Democratic Party joined this campaign by throwing Sarah Jama, a member of the Ontario provincial legislature, out of the party’s caucus last week for a statement defending the Palestinians. Jama has been censured in the legislature by the Ford government, preventing her from speaking until she renounces and deletes her statement, and issues an “apology.”

Student reaction has been swift in condemning the actions of the university as it attempts to stifle free speech on campus. Student groups like the Graduate Political Science Student Association (GPSSA) have organized meetings that have been attended in record numbers to draft statements supporting the right to free speech and academic integrity and condemning the genocide in Palestine.

Last Wednesday, delegates from student associations, union representatives, and participants from the student body met in front of Vari Hall to stage a rally in defense of academic freedom and to denounce the anti-democratic university administration. The rally was well attended with hundreds of students present. There was a heavy presence of York University security at the event, with many private security guards monitoring the crowd. The event itself was peaceful with speakers making numerous expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

This is a powerful current running through the youth and working class. The sympathy for a people being brutally oppressed and murdered is proving difficult to stamp out. While all the media conglomerates and state resources of the American and Canadian states and their allies are mobilized to turn public opinion against the Palestinians, they are having a remarkably difficult time. Conditions have changed in the last twenty years that make previous media blitzes like those surrounding the 2006 Lebanon war far less effective. Trust in media and the state is low as their lies collide with reality. Workers are told the economy is doing well and will bring them prosperity, and that the liberal “rules-based order” values

human rights. But this runs up against reality and experiences. The hot-poker of deteriorating social conditions is giving students and workers the same experiences and conditioning the same reaction to the actions of the imperialist states—revulsion.

But this struggle cannot remain limited to the student unions, nor confined to the campuses. To combat the genocidal attack on the Palestinian people requires confronting global capitalism and great questions of history. Above all, it demands a turn to the working class, the decisive revolutionary force in society, whose struggles for social and economic improvements that have already seen millions strike around the world this year must be unified with the burgeoning movement against war.

Students must understand that the struggle against censorship developing at York University is not an isolated event. Rather, it is part of a wider global struggle against anti-democratic attacks by university administrations and capitalist governments targeting democratic and socialist leaning students. Just last week, the administration at Humboldt University in the German capital of Berlin blocked the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) from holding a meeting on Israel’s genocide on the spurious basis that student clubs cannot express opinions about “general political events.”

York students need to look to the working class and expanding their struggle internationally, imbuing it with democratic-egalitarian and socialist political content. To that end, students should join the IYSSE and build clubs at their universities. They must look beyond the parochial interests of the student associations and look toward organizing an independent movement of the working class on an international basis. Only by involving the broader working class can capitalism be confronted. To take up this fight, contact us at iysseincanada@gmail.com



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