As popular opposition mounts, state-backed campaign against pro-Palestinian students intensifies in New York

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The escalation of the genocidal assault by the Israeli government against Gaza over the past few days has corresponded with a growth in the groundswell of opposition to Zionism and its imperialist backers. Spontaneous demonstrations erupted in major cities across the world in response to the destruction of Palestinian internet communication systems and the surge in ground operations announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) systems in Gaza on Thursday and Friday. This weekend saw the largest demonstrations to date against the genocide.

Israeli military officials have described the escalation as the "next phase" of what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a "war for humanity... against barbarism." US and NATO imperialist backers of Israel have already begun to send forces to the region in support of the surge, in a conflict that is beginning to engulf the wider Middle East. Gaza's Health Ministry has reported over 8,000 Palestinian deaths since October 7, with electricity and water having been cut off to the area closely following the Israeli assault.

On Wednesday, President Biden brazenly downplayed the scale of destruction, cynically implying that official death tolls were intentionally skewed in favor of Palestine. US national security spokesman John Kirby said Friday that there were no "red lines" that the US would impose upon the Netanyahu government with respect to its military operations.

The American ruling class has accompanied the Israeli onslaught with an escalation of its attacks on democratic rights. On Thursday, the US Senate passed a resolution by unanimous consent, slandering students for "expressing solidarity with terrorists" and promoting "antisemitism." While the resolution was proposed by fascistic Republican Senator Josh Hawley, it was voted on by every Democrat and Republican. The resolution specifically named student organizations at Harvard University, the president of the Student Bar Association at New York University and chapters of the Students for Justice in Palestine.

With this resolution, the entire political establishment and state have given official backing to an ongoing campaign to brand all opponents of the unfolding genocide on campuses as "anti-Semites." This campaign has already seen the doxxing of pro-Palestinian students' personal information as well as calls by corporate firms to bar students who engage in pro-Palestinian speech from employment within their spheres of influence. Reports of violent threats, online harassment and termination from employment resulting from these well-funded smear campaigns have been widespread.

In New York, a bastion of the Democratic Party, this campaign has been particularly ferocious. On Thursday in Washington Square Park, a location central to the campus of New York University (NYU), a pro-Israel demonstration was staged by roughly 200 individuals. The event was hosted by the Edgar Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at NYU, and featured former New York City mayor, Democrat Bill de Blasio. De Blasio, speaking on behalf of "progressive Democrats," gave a statement which condemned the "Hamas terror" and lent unconditional support to "the state of Israel." Despite the apparent backing from NYU, the state and the Democratic establishment, the demonstration was far smaller than any of the pro-Palestinian demonstrations held on campus over recent weeks.

At Columbia University, an electronic billboard truck was seen on campus displaying the names of pro-Palestinian individuals and organizations under the banner, "Columbia's Leading Antisemites." The billboard trucks have been revealed to be owned by Accuracy in Media (AIM), a right-wing media company currently chaired by Florida businessman Adam Guillette. Similar trucks have also been dispatched to Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania.

While the President of Columbia University, Minouche Shafik, has publicly spoken out against the doxxing of pro-Palestinian students, pro-Zionist forces at Columbia have exerted immense pressure on the administration to capitulate to the right-wing campaign of slander and intimidation on behalf of the Israeli government. Last week, a Columbia professor unleashed a vicious tirade against Shafik, calling on the president to crack down on "pro-terror" student organizations.

On Sunday, over 75 faculty members at Columbia and Barnard from dozens of different departments signed a

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principled open letter which unequivocally denounced the antidemocratic slander of students who oppose Israel as "antisemitic" and the public broadcasting of their personal information. The open letter denounced "these egregious forms of harassment and efforts to chill otherwise protected speech on campus" as "unacceptable". The document also defended students who were victimized for signing a statement made by a coalition of Columbia student organizations which clarified the historical role of Zionism as the main oppressor in the decades-long conflict. The statement said:

> We are appalled that trucks broadcasting students' names and images are circling the campus, identifying them individually as "Columbia's Leading Anti-Semites", and that some students have had offers of employment withdrawn by employers that sought to punish them for signing the student statement, or for being merely affiliated with student groups associated with the statement. In the absence of university action, students and faculty have undertaken the burden of blocking the images and identifying information broadcast on the doxxing trucks. It is worth noting that most of the students targeted by this doxing campaign are Arab, Muslim, Palestinian, or South Asian.
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> One of the core responsibilities of a world-class university is to interrogate the underlying facts of both settled propositions and those that are ardently disputed. As faculty we are committed to the project of holding discomfort and working across difference with our students. These core academic values and purposes are profoundly undermined when our students are vilified for voicing perspectives that, while legitimately debated in other institutional settings, expose them to severe forms of harassment and intimidation at Columbia.

The attacks on freedom of speech and assembly at university campuses is part and parcel of the most recent chapter of "donor revolt," that is, the effort by the billionaires and multi-millionaires which comprise the American ruling establishment to rein in popular opposition to the policies of the US and its key geo-strategic partners on major US academic institutions. Philanthropic foundations and prominent American political figures have already begun to withdrawn funding to such universities as Harvard and Columbia in an effort to suppress and control political dialogue on campuses.

But the escalating campaign, backed by the state and US government, to intimidate and outlaw popular opposition to the genocide on campuses and beyond has failed to stem the tide of the protests—on the contrary, they have grown.

Only this weekend in New York City, massive demonstrations of hundreds of thousands took place opposing the genocidal assault against Gaza. On Friday, the organization Jewish Voice for Peace held a protest which led to the spontaneous occupation and shutting down of Midtown Manhattan's Grand Central Station. The action continued well after the New York City Police (NYPD) demanded its halt and began detaining protestors. Saturday saw a march of 50,000-100,000 protestors across the Brooklyn bridge in support of the Palestinian people.

Similar demonstrations have occurred all over the US, and internationally. In Chicago on Saturday, 30,000-40,000 similarly marched in the city's downtown area against Israel and in support of Palestine. In London, half a million marched across the Westminster Bridge in opposition to the escalation. In Turkey on Friday, an event celebrating the centenary of the Turkish Republic turned into a demonstration of mass support for Palestine. Similar spontaneous actions have also been reported throughout the Middle East, including in Jordan, Tunisia, as well as in the West Bank. In European cities including Paris and Berlin, thousands have attended pro-Palestinian protests despite the efforts by establishment politicians of all shades to legally proscribe them, and by their police agencies to physically suppress them.

In order for this emerging mass movement against the crimes of the Zionist regime in Israel and against imperialism to succeed, it is critical that it turn to the movement of the international working class. This includes support for the struggle among American auto workers to fight against the imposition of a sellout contract by the major manufacturing companies and their enforcers in the pro-corporate labor union apparatus. Students and youth must turn to the struggle to unite workers in all sectors for a global movement against the capitalist system, the root cause of social inequality and global imperialist warfare. We urge all those interested in taking up this fight to join the IYSSE and to contact the WSWS today to get involved.

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